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# The iconography of warfare: Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid Persian rhetoric of human dominance

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The iconography of warfare:  
Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid Persian rhetoric of human dominance

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## Abstract

After studying Greek and Near Eastern art and archaeology at the University of Colorado Boulder, I was thrilled to be offered a job at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in the summer of 2013. My task was to help catalogue and then draw the impressions left by sealstones on the clay documents of an ancient government archive, the Persepolis Fortification Archive, which recorded payments made in food and beverages to people engaged in imperial business at and near the capital city, Persepolis, around 500 B.C. As I gained an overview of the seal impressions on the entire archive, I was struck by the lack of imagery having to do with warfare. Indeed, it seemed to be the least represented category out of all the possible iconographic images identified in the archive. This seemed surprising, given the emphasis in ancient Greek literature (and modern movies) on Persian warfare, and the size and impact of the Achaemenid Persian Empire which had flourished between ca. 550 and 330 B.C. and had extended from western India to the Nile, including also northern Greece and reaching into the steppes east of the Caspian. I decided to investigate the iconography of warfare in the art of the Achaemenid Empire in the years around 500, a time when Darius I (“the Great”) was king, and to compare it to the iconography of warfare in the empire that had preceded the Achaemenid in the ancient Near East, the Neo-Assyrian. In order to provide the closest comparison, I focused my research on the monumental art created by a single king to display imperial ideology in relief sculpture (Ashurbanipal IV for Assyria, Darius I for Achaemenid Persia). The art of seals (glyptic art) provided me with an avenue to consider iconographies designed for individuals to use in their everyday transactions. In this area I focused on seal impressions on archives, as archival documents can be dated and we know exactly where they were found, and as this allowed me to link seal usage with the documents on which they were impressed. I tried also to contextualize these seal impressions within a broader selection of sealstones currently housed in museums or private collections.

A surprising and completely new discovery emerged from this research. The public rhetoric of Neo-Assyria is full of violence, both in monumental art and in public inscriptions. Glyptic imagery does not mirror the public rhetoric: vanishingly few individuals chose to have warfare iconography portrayed on their seals. The state archives themselves offer another view, however, and make it clear that the military was active in everyday life and was pervasive throughout the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Over the course of the reign of Darius I, Achaemenid Persian monumental iconography developed the visual rhetoric it was to proclaim for the rest of the empire’s existence, shunning portrayals of violence or human domination and replacing them with scenes of harmony and balance with the king at the center. Similarly, by the end of Darius’ reign, public verbal historical narratives are replaced by declarations of royal legitimacy. Even imperial archives refer only seldom to military matters. But what is shocking is that those few images of warfare that appear in glyptic emphasize explicit combat, usually with identifiable Persians slaying, dominating, or otherwise overwhelming people of a different ethnicity. This is an entirely new recognition.

This thesis thus reveals that those few individuals who selected scenes of Persian power conveyed a sense of might in a way completely different than official imperial portrayals. They departed from traditions set even by the warmongering Assyrians to emphasize both combat and ethnicity in their selection.

## Chapter I: Introduction

The two great first-millennium empires in the ancient Near East both used warfare iconography in their visual culture and imperial rhetoric, but in very different ways. The kings of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (950-612)<sup>1</sup> were famous for adorning their palace walls with large-scale reliefs portraying their military exploits. This stands in contrast to the imagery on their sealstones that rarely displayed any scenes of human dominance. The kings of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (550-330) did not utilize warfare iconography in their monumental art, and like the Neo-Assyrians, used it only infrequently on their sealstones. When it did appear on their seals, in contrast to Neo-Assyrian imagery, Achaemenid warfare iconography was graphic, violent, and often directed against people of specific ethnicities. Both empires depended on their military strength to expand and secure their territories, but they used military iconography in their visual rhetoric in different ways.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was the largest empire the world had yet seen, and its kings held complete control of the ancient Near East between the ninth and seventh centuries.<sup>2</sup> As we will see, visual imagery played a significant role in attaining and maintaining the power needed to do this. The way the Neo-Assyrian kings used public art as propaganda on the walls of their palaces, with violent images that served as overt and shocking warnings to obey the king, underwent a great change when the Achaemenid Persians established their empire in the mid-sixth century, an empire that was eventually to dwarf the Neo-Assyrian in size. The Persians used monumental art in very different ways than their predecessors. They neglected all of the violence utilized by the Neo-Assyrians and instead depicted an empire at balance. Though the Persians did not adorn their palace walls with sculpted accounts of their military campaigns, they

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<sup>1</sup> All dates in this thesis are B.C.

<sup>2</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Teissier, *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals*, 33; Russell, *From Nineveh to New York*, 18.

did occasionally adopt warfare iconography in glyptic art — the art of seals — though it is still a rare iconographic choice.

Both empires utilized unique iconography in monumental and public displays, at the same time that they used visual imagery on their sealstones, administrative tools owned by individuals and offices to ratify documents and show ownership. The glyptic corpora from both empires include rare examples of scenes showing human dominance. Therefore, while the two empires depicted themselves quite differently in the monumental medium in their representations of kingship and military, the rare but important examples of warfare imagery on sealstones link the two empires in a different way. Perhaps most interestingly, the scenes of shocking violence that characterize Neo-Assyrian palatial art but were shunned in Achaemenid Persian monumental visual culture predominate in those few scenes of warfare that turn up in Achaemenid glyptic, even as they are avoided by individuals in the Neo-Assyrian period.

### *Interpretive Framework*

With this study I aim to illuminate the use of ancient Near Eastern warfare iconography by tracing it across empires and media to determine patterns of its use and its role in ancient visual culture and rhetoric. This paper explores the visual culture and imperial ideology of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, both in itself and as an antecedent to the Achaemenid Persian Empire. In turning to the Achaemenid period, I focus on the Persian artistic program during the reign of Darius I to gain the deepest understanding of an empire's iconographic choices. To do this I detail the known uses of warfare iconography at fifth century Persepolis in the monumental and glyptic evidence. Scenes of human dominance are slight in both the Achaemenid glyptic art and the Assyrian. As we will see, empires that controlled vast territory and peoples in antiquity did

not display their military exploits consistently in their visual programs, and some hardly showed it at all.

Before evaluating the seals and monuments that bear warfare iconography, it is important to clarify the criteria by which they were identified. Scenes of humans dominating animals are extremely common in glyptic art in the ancient Near East, but those showing humans dominating other humans strikingly rare. This thesis is only concerned with scenes of human dominance in a military context. In addition to scenes of explicit warfare, scenes that allude to combat without actually showing it, for example those showing prisoners, are discussed since they might imply combat has just occurred or is imminent.<sup>3</sup>

When it is possible, I will indicate the ethnicity of the figures we encounter in monumental and glyptic examples, as well as in the textual evidence. As will be apparent, each empire treated the portrayal of ethnicity differently. The examples below will indicate how portrayal of ethnicity contributes to the message of both the visual and textual rhetoric.

With these considerations, this thesis suggests that the use of warfare iconography was overall largely unpopular in the glyptic medium for both of these empires and that people instead chose to represent themselves with non-militaristic visual expression. Both empires exhibited this trend in the glyptic evidence, even though their monumental depictions of their imperial ideology varied greatly from each other. In the instances where the two overlap in their representation of the military, both textual and visual, the two empires depict such imagery in unique and interesting ways. Thus the consistency in the two empires' peoples rejecting the use of warfare iconography in their seals is even more significant. What is perhaps most interesting

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to point out that the seals I include here are not the only glyptic examples of human dominance. For example, there are a number of sexual encounter scenes that one might label as showing one human dominating another. Also, I exclude any consideration of other types of human dominance, such as adults versus children. I am interested very specifically in images of military dominance.

is that individuals within the Achaemenid Persian Empire were more likely than their counterparts in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, when they selected images of warfare for their seals, to include images of violence and imagery targeted towards specific ethnic groups.

### *Methodology*

From the two large empires included here I consider monumental art, as well as the glyptic corpora, including both provenanced and unprovenanced material. For Assyria this means investigating the palace structures and their adornment at the imperial capitals, Nimrud and Nineveh, and for Persia the Apadana (audience hall) at Persepolis. In addition, I include non-Persepolitan monuments as valuable comparanda to the display at Persepolis.

Before discussing the seals themselves, it is important to acknowledge that all but two of the Neo-Assyrian seals are unprovenanced. This means that no one is able to determine a seal's place of origin, its location of use, nor the timeframe within which it was made or used. This is a common problem when working with ancient artifacts, and when one cannot identify an object's provenance, one must rely on artistic style for a dating estimate. I have included here only those unprovenanced seals that scholars confidently date to the Neo-Assyrian period. To find these artifacts, I consulted the State Archives of Assyria (SAS) publication that showcases seals known through their impressions on clay documents as they were used at the major administrative centers of Nineveh and Nimrud. From this archival collection I discovered two seals that show warfare iconography, approximately 0.004% of the archives' seal impressions. In addition to using this source of glyptic, I conducted a sweeping overview of dozens of publications of seals in museums and private collections in order to provide some perspective on the overall limited use of warfare iconography in this medium. This search turned up an additional five seals to consider, as well as two more seals that refer to combat but do not depict it explicitly, for a

combined glyptic corpus of nine Neo-Assyrian seals bearing images that show or suggest warfare. This is a very small group when considered against the thousands of known Neo-Assyrian seals.

For investigating the Achaemenid Persian use of warfare iconography in glyptic I consulted all of the known seals in the Persepolis Fortification Archive (PFA), a collection of seals represented by their impressions on the clay documents of an archive from Persepolis dating to 509-494. This supplied me with a sample of seven provenanced seals bearing warfare iconography.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the PFA, I utilized Christopher Tuplin's forthcoming catalogue of warfare iconography on Achaemenid-era seals. This includes sixty-three seals bearing military scenes, with both provenanced and unprovenanced material.<sup>5</sup>

### *Thesis Outline*

Chapter II, "Historical Background of the Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid Persian Empires," includes a brief history of both empires to situate us in the social and political environments within which the art originated. Chapter III, "Warfare Iconography in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, in Monumental and Glyptic Visual Culture," explores the monumental art of the Neo-Assyrian kings, focusing on the large-scale wall reliefs of King Ashurbanipal's palace at Nineveh, built in the seventh century. In addition to this royal art, I include a discussion of Neo-Assyrian warfare images in glyptic and how they compare to the monumental examples. Chapter IV, "Neo-Assyrian Imperial and Archival Texts," highlights the Neo-Assyrian textual evidence for warfare, including the kings' annals and monumental inscriptions as well as textual

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<sup>4</sup> There are two additional seals in the PFA, PFS 2214 and PFS 2415, that possibly show scenes of militaristic human dominance. Due to their fragmentary appearance and stylistic rendering I am not confident labeling them as warfare iconography and thus do not discuss them here.

<sup>5</sup> To this total I add one seal, PFS 93\*, which Tuplin does not include, so that my total sample includes sixty-four Achaemenid-era seals with warfare iconography.

references to warfare in the SAS documents. Chapter V, “Warfare Iconography in the Achaemenid Persian Empire,” discusses the monumental visual culture at Persepolis as well as the seals that show warfare iconography in the PFA. In addition, this chapter begins with information on the visual culture of the Achaemenid Empire during the reign of Darius I, starting with his rock-cut victory monument at Behistun, as well as the palatial complexes at the new capital city, Persepolis, and the royal tombs at Naqsh-e-Rostam. Then it turns to the Achaemenid seals at Persepolis. Chapter VI, “Achaemenid Imperial and Archival Texts,” discusses the imperial and archival administrative tablets on which the Achaemenid seals appeared, as well as the monumental text of Darius at Behistun. Also, this chapter explores archival texts that mention the military and what they tell us about military life in the empire.

## Chapter II: Historical Background of the Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid Persian Empires

### II.I: The Neo-Assyrian Empire

The ancient Assyrians originated in the land of Ashur, the fertile area in northern Mesopotamia (present day Iraq) between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and its inhabitants believed the land belonged to one of the ancient Near Eastern gods, Ashur.<sup>6</sup> He was patron deity of a city named after him that various Mesopotamian societies occupied throughout its history, and that eventually became the capital of the Assyrians. The Neo-Assyrian kings continued and expanded upon the Middle Assyrian nation until it became an empire, with its largest range under Esarhaddon (680-669) when it encompassed Elam, Babylonia, eastern Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Map of Neo-Assyrian Empire

<sup>6</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Baikie, *Ancient Assyria*, 2; Russell, 18; Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia*, 148; Laessoe, *People of Ancient Assyria*, 98; Teissier, 33; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 473.



The Neo-Assyrian kings held central control in the empire through absolute power over their people.<sup>7</sup> The king attained this power with help from the Assyrian belief that Assyria and its gods, especially the great sky god Ashur, were superior to all others in the Near East. This relationship between the god and the king solidified the king's power in the eyes of those he ruled. The king was thought to serve as Ashur's representative to the empire's people, which meant that servility toward the king was also directed toward the god.

The connection between the imperial ruler and deity is demonstrated by the following undated treaty from Assyria, commissioned by an unknown king. "You shall guard [this treaty tablet which] is sealed with the seal of Ashur, king of the gods, and set it up in your presences, like your own god."<sup>8</sup> This is an important example. First, it demonstrates the governmental collaboration between Ashur and the king because the treaty is described as being sealed by the god, implying that the god approved of the king's actions. Second, the treaty, an imperial document, is expected to be on display and regarded as a god because it was imbued with divine power and ought to be treated accordingly, implying that the Neo-Assyrian government required pious actions the way a god did.

This does not mean that the Neo-Assyrians forced others to worship their gods; in fact, the Assyrians acknowledged conquered peoples' deities and respected them. A report from Esarhaddon (680-669) states an example: "[He showed] (i.e., the king) kindness towards the captured gods of all lands, whose sanctuaries had been trampled, (so that the gods) might grant him the blessing of long life and [permit] his offspring [to rule] over man kind."<sup>9</sup> Instead of forcing others to worship Ashur and the rest of the Assyrian pantheon, the Neo-Assyrian king

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<sup>7</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Kuhrt, 505, 511-512.

<sup>8</sup> Parpola et al., *Neo-Assyrian Treaties*, no. 6 ll. 407-409, quoted in Kuhrt, 512.

<sup>9</sup> Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria*, 29ff, quoted in Kuhrt, 514.

expected all people to show loyalty to him. This meant that people showed more reverence to the king than any other mortal being and this in part resulted in a strong and united empire.

*Neo-Assyria: demographics and the military*

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was primarily made up of peasants, and they served as the majority of its soldiers and the population of Assyrians that the kings dispersed throughout the empire.<sup>10</sup> Most Assyrian slaves were captured in war, but some people may have been forced into slavery to resolve a debt. Among the slaves, foreigners had the fewest rights and carried out the most dangerous jobs.

The empire's peasants and slaves contributed to the extreme military might of the army, a feature of the Neo-Assyrian Empire that helps explain its great size.<sup>11</sup> The military was highly organized and boasted a standing army of professional soldiers, made up of both natives and captives. In addition to slaves, all Assyrian male citizens were obligated to serve in the military for at least one term. The requirement excluded wealthy men who could pay the empire instead of serving or could send another person in his place. Male citizens who did not serve in the regular army contributed to the militia, which also used conquered peoples.

In addition to relying on its military strength, the Neo-Assyrian Empire increased in size by establishing treaties with subjugated communities that were often mutually beneficial; the king provided protection from outsiders to other areas, and they, in return, were expected to

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<sup>10</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Stiebing, *Ancient Near Eastern History*, 274. A peasant differed from a slave in that a peasant was free and held more rights and services from the state. For example, the state provided two years' support to the widow of a peasant killed or captured in battle.

<sup>11</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Stiebing, 275; Kuhrt contends that because so many people were captured in battle, in addition to those deported, most of the army was made up of foreigners. (Kuhrt, 533.) Sargon II provides an example of captured foreigners in his annals in regard to his campaigns in Samaria: "A contingent of 200 chariots and 600 men on horseback I formed from among the inhabitants of Hamath and added them to my royal corps." (Lie, *The Inscriptions of Sargon II*, quoted in Pritchard, *Volume I*, 196.)

show obedience to the king, offer yearly tribute, and send men to serve in the army.<sup>12</sup> Daniel Snell compares the Assyrian Empire and its imperialism to more recent examples such as Nazism, where “the center, the motherland, demanded obedience from the unruly, subhuman periphery, and those lucky enough to be born Assyrians had a duty to obey their leader and expand his domain.”<sup>13</sup> As we will see shortly, those who were subservient to the empire received some benefits, namely that they were not slaughtered for misbehaving, because cities in the periphery did not have the option of denying Assyria what it needed — worship and resources (human and natural). But there are examples of the Assyrian kings offering more tangible and actively positive gifts for obeying, such as houses and fields for grain cultivation.<sup>14</sup>

An example of Assyrian control at the fringes of the empire is provided by the city of Tushhan in Anatolia, near modern Diyarbakir.<sup>15</sup> King Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) moved Assyrians to Tushhan and took over the city by building garrisons and a palace, and erecting a statue of himself inscribed with descriptions of his military victories. These acts ensured that people outside of the Assyrian heartland understood Assyria’s dominant presence in Tushhan. Such presence served as a reminder to obey the king, as well as promoted loyalty to the empire because the king’s statue represented the ruler by proxy. Another type of imperial control is suggested by the city of Habhu in northern Mesopotamia, which Ashurnasirpal renamed as “Ashurnasirpal City,” a clear reminder of who was in charge. These acts of imperialism proved influential in controlling subjugated communities and led their inhabitants to support the king and his empire with tribute and compliance.

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<sup>12</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Stiebing, 276; Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture*, 143.

<sup>13</sup> Snell, *Life in the Ancient*, 79.

<sup>14</sup> A well-known example comes from the Bible in a speech addressing the Jerusalemites as a call to surrender: “...for thus says the king of Assyria [Sennacherib]: ‘Make peace with me and come forth to me and eat, each from his vine and each from his fig tree and drink, each from the water of his well, — when I come and take you to a land like your land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, (a land of olive oil and honey, and you will live and not die, but do not listen to Hezekiah because he is inciting you...)’” (II Kings 18:31-32.)

<sup>15</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Kuhrt, 479, 483-485, 519.

These actions appear to be minimally harmful in that they do not involve mass destruction and murder. In this way they provide a contrast to the many notorious activities of the Assyrians while campaigning — and they are not the only examples of relatively benevolent control. As Amélie Kuhrt states,

The relations between Assyria and its smaller neighbors were not always marked by aggression, destruction and plunder — careful decoding of the rhetoric of the royal inscriptions reveals that several states were anxious to establish mutually profitable relations, and so share in Assyria's growing glory and power by linking themselves to the Assyrian court via precious gifts, military aid and perhaps marriage.<sup>16</sup>

An example of this non-violent rule involves Sargon II's campaigns in Anatolia where he obtained natural resources for the Assyrian people.<sup>17</sup> Also, Ashurbanipal is said to have brought home vast amounts of booty so that all Assyrians could afford foreign luxuries.<sup>18</sup> In return for these goods brought back from the king, most citizens had to provide service to the empire.

These seemingly indirect means of control are interesting examples of Assyria's power and stand in important contrast to the empire's artistic depictions of its might. One will see how the monumental palace reliefs most often depicted scenes of direct military control over others, rather than conveying a notion of the gentler interactions implied by Kuhrt. Nor do they provide visual examples of the king providing luxuries for his people. This indicates that in some instances the royal textual rhetoric did not always match the royal visual rhetoric.

Sources for learning about the military abound, including rich visual and textual information.<sup>19</sup> Thus we know that the Neo-Assyrian administration reorganized the military into three parts — chariotry, infantry, and cavalry — marking an improvement from previous

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<sup>16</sup> Kuhrt, 485.

<sup>17</sup> Sargon II describes in his annals some of these items obtained from a battle in Samaria: "I received as their presents, gold in the form of dust, precious stones, ivory, ebony-seeds, all kinds of aromatic substances, horses (and) camels." (Lie, quoted in Pritchard, *Volume I*, 197.)

<sup>18</sup> Some of these items include silver, donkeys, and camels. (Pritchard, *Volume I*, 197.)

<sup>19</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Stiebing, 275-276; Roaf, *Cultural Atlas*, 179.

militaries that utilized only chariotry and infantry.<sup>20</sup> During the reign of Ashurbanipal IV (668-627) chariots held a driver, an archer, and two shield-bearers so that they could move as well-protected military units. While the chariots were well equipped, they were not as useful in battle as the cavalry because the cavalry maneuvered more easily around opponents and through oncoming forces — and most of all, they had fewer terrain limitations. The use of a large cavalry unit within the army is considered to be the most significant military innovation of the Assyrians.<sup>21</sup>

Within the infantry the Assyrians used archers, slingers, and spearmen.<sup>22</sup> The archers and slingers provided protection for the spearmen who were responsible for assaults in battles and sieges. All Assyrian soldiers wore bronze or iron helmets, and occasionally chain mail shirts or other types of body armor such as scale-armor. Figure 2 shows Assyrian archers and slingers during a siege and provides a clear example of scale body armor, as indicated by the carved lines across their chests, as well as the characteristic pointed helmets.



*Figure 2: Neo-Assyrian palace relief, Nineveh*

<sup>20</sup> Assyria was a militaristic state, and while the king held absolute power, he did employ a group of advisors made up of army officials and governors. Tiglath-pileser III (745-727) especially had military success with his creation of a standing professional army of foot soldiers, made up primarily of Aramaean mercenaries.

<sup>21</sup> Stiebing, 275.

<sup>22</sup> This paragraph uses Stiebing, 275-276; Curtis et al., *Art and Empire: Treasures*, 67.

Alongside these three units, the military used specialists for particular situations, like miners to dig tunnels when besieging a city.<sup>23</sup> Also, engineers built battering rams, siege towers, ramps, bridges, and boats so that the army was prepared for various events and enjoyed an army few could oppose. Another category of elite soldiers was the “men of valor,” a group who could afford to arm themselves for battle, and who are believed to have been influential in their community outside of the army as well as within — perhaps a kind of soldier-politician. One may infer from this group of men, as well as the required military tenure, that Assyria was a full-time military state, with its army playing a prominent role in the daily lives of its people.

Another aspect of organization that contributed to Neo-Assyrian military dominance involved the establishment of ancient way stations for the king and his soldiers to restock supplies while on the road.<sup>24</sup> This system began during the reign of Ashur-dan II (934-912), the first of the Neo-Assyrian kings. To provision the way stations, Ashur-dan used tribute from conquered peoples to support the new network throughout the empire. The well-coordinated military machine, with its highly trained and flexible soldiery and advanced supply system, enabled Assyrian kings and their staff to work on expanding the empire, gathering resources for the full-time army, and squashing rebellion year-round.

*Neo-Assyria: scare tactics*

The Assyrian army boasted great military organization, but it also employed what William Stiebing Jr. calls “calculated frightfulness” to scare people into submission.<sup>25</sup> Examples of this include skinning people alive, impaling and erecting captives around their freshly-

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<sup>23</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Stiebing, 276; Snell, 86.

<sup>24</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Kuhrt, 479, 482.

<sup>25</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Stiebing, 277; Kuhrt, 517.

conquered cities, and butchering various body parts.<sup>26</sup> These acts were meant to resonate with people as warnings of what would happen to those who rebelled, and the kings even depicted such torture in sculpted relief on their palace walls. The king justified this brutality by claiming he was punishing evil, where evil represented immorality (i.e., not surrendering to Assyria and Ashur).<sup>27</sup> Thus when the king punished evil and displayed these murderous acts he showed off his high moral being, similarly to displaying his piety.

Another way of punishing disloyal populations involved deporting a community's nobles, merchants, and artisans as spoils of war and forcing them to serve and support Assyria.<sup>28</sup> It is estimated that the Assyrians deported and relocated around the empire hundreds of thousands of people — by spreading people out the Assyrians apparently hoped to defuse nationalist tendencies and avoid revolts.<sup>29</sup> However, with so many people uprooted, the administration found itself struggling with a population of foreigners who now potentially resented the state. The kings seem to have attempted assimilation between displaced populations and native Assyrians by using foreigners in all ranks of the army and in various palace occupations, as well as imposing taxes on other ethnic groups equal to (rather than higher than) those imposed on the Assyrians. These aspects of assimilation, combined with the respect displayed for other peoples'

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<sup>26</sup> Sargon II's provides an example of these tactics. In his annals he states, "Ia'ubidi from Hamath, a commoner without claim to the throne, a cursed Hittite, schemed to become king of Hamath, induced the cities Arvad, Simirra, Damascus and Samaria to desert me, made them collaborate and fitted out an army. I called up the masses of the soldiers of Ashur and besieged him and his warriors in Qarqar, his favorite city. I conquered (it) and burnt (it). Himself I flayed; the rebels I killed in their cities and established (again) peace and harmony." (Lie, quoted in Pritchard, *Volume I*, 196.)

<sup>27</sup> Kuhrt, 517.

<sup>28</sup> This paragraph uses information from Stiebing, 277; Snell, 79; Roaf, *Cultural Atlas*, 179; Kuhrt, 533; Gallagher, "Assyrian Deportation Propaganda," 57.

<sup>29</sup> Sargon II mentions deportees in his annals: "...[The town I] re[build] better than (it was) before and [settled] therein people from countries which [I] myself [had con]quered. I placed an officer of mine as governor over them and imposed upon them tribute as (is customary) for Assyrian citizens." (Lie, quoted in Pritchard, *Volume I*, 195.) Daniel Snell estimates a number closer to 4.5 million deportees over three centuries, with the most being moved from 745 to 627. In his annals, Sargon II offers a specific number of captives from one incident: "I besieged and conquered Samaria (Sa-me-ri-na), led away as booty 27, 290 inhabitants of it." (Lie, quoted in Pritchard, *Volume I*, 195.)

deities, may have helped the kings incorporate the many different peoples into the empire. It was crucial for the Assyrian kings to downplay the negative aspects of deportation and convince the displaced populations that they belonged within the empire.

The soldiers in the army were well cared for, and this paper will soon demonstrate how they formed the primary subjects of Neo-Assyrian palace art.<sup>30</sup> The soldiers were supported with (pillaged) resources from the towns they captured, but they were also given government rations when off-duty or working in non-pillaging labor. All soldiers seem to have been treated equally throughout the year. For example, officers in the army, as well as ordinary soldiers, received the same rations. This indicates that all men who served the army, regardless of rank or ethnicity, were cared for equally both in times of battle and during times of peace.<sup>31</sup> The practice highlights the militaristic nature of life in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, demonstrating the importance of soldiers and the perceived need to keep them well-fed and battle-ready at all times.

## *II.II: The Achaemenid Persian Empire*



Figure 3: Map of Achaemenid Persian Empire

<sup>30</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture*, 143; Snell, 82.

<sup>31</sup> Snell compares the Assyrian army to the modern day Israeli army, where, he says, they “allowed its officers to draw on comradeship in arms as well as the power of command and coercion to get their men to do ridiculously dangerous things” (ibid.).



During the rule of Cyrus the Great (559-530) the Achaemenid Persians took over the land previously ruled by the Medes; through the expansionist campaigns of Cyrus, his son Cambyses, and the usurper Darius I the Achaemenid Empire would become the largest the world had yet seen, far eclipsing the Neo-Assyrian of a hundred years before.<sup>32</sup> At its greatest extent, reached around 500, the Achaemenid Empire controlled the area from the Indus in the East to the Nile in the West, encompassing parts of India, Iran, Syria, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Egypt, and Thrace, for an empire totaling approximately two million square miles (Figure 3). The overview presented here focuses on the period during which Darius I reigned, providing a backdrop to the discussion of the iconography of warfare in the same period that follows.

*Achaemenid Persia: Darius I and imperial organization*

Darius I (522-486) seized the Persian throne in 522 and invested great energy in consolidating the empire and reorganizing its political structures.<sup>33</sup> Thus he married the daughters and wives of the kings before him, legitimating his position on the throne. Also, he broke up the empire into additional satrapies. A satrapy was similar to a province, and a satrap was the governor who controlled such an area. Though the satrapies had their own boundaries, collectively they formed one united sociopolitical unit that allowed for administrative consistency across their boundaries, which helped to consolidate the empire. Satraps reported to the king and were responsible for assembling men when an army was needed. They also oversaw local business such as road construction and tax collection.

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<sup>32</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art*, 177; Teissier, 45; Waters, *Ancient Persia*, 6, 77-78.

<sup>33</sup> For specific examples of Achaemenid presence and consolidation in its satrapies, especially Sardis, see Dusinberre, *Aspects of Empire*. Information for this paragraph comes from Porada, *The Art of Ancient Iran*, 147; Root, *The King and Kingship*, 40; Kuhrt, 667-669, 689, 698; Waters, 102; Dusinberre, *Empire, Authority, and Autonomy*, 63-64.

At an authoritative level below that of satrap were positions that locals (i.e., non-ethnic Persians, often elite) could fill.<sup>34</sup> This use of locals in positions of power allowed for the Persian government to appeal to the non-native peoples and thus gain greater authority over them. The local leaders could encourage loyalty to the Persian government by appealing to non-Persians similar to themselves. This meant that the “Persians harnessed diverse local traditions to exercise power flexibly and that they interacted closely with their subjects. Although the Achaemenid kings used local languages for their decrees, they also employed Aramaic as a kind of lingua franca, and spread its use throughout the imperial territories.”<sup>35</sup> This is an important component to Persian power. The kings allowed local people to continue their own customs while at the same time instituting a commonality, for example Aramaic, that linked them to the greater power in charge. Thus the use of non-ethnic Persians in the government created loyalty to the Achaemenid king through the combination of local and non-local practices. We also know from epigraphic evidence that in addition to the use of Aramaic, local languages prevailed, which may have helped the Persian administration appeal to its subject communities by tolerating non-Persian customs.

Darius was met with intense opposition on his acquisition of the throne, but he dealt with the uprisings with militaristic and organizational prowess such that he united the empire and garnered support and loyalty from the polyethnic elite.<sup>36</sup> Also, he implemented a successful administrative system that led to internal success with the development of standardized tribute, and he expanded the empire to what would be its greatest extent. The king added many areas to Persia’s rule, such as northwest India, various Aegean islands, Egypt, and parts of Thrace. Darius

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<sup>34</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Kuhrt, 699; Dusiaberre, *Empire, Authority, and Autonomy*, 63-64.

<sup>35</sup> Kuhrt, 699.

<sup>36</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Kuhrt, 665-666.

also commissioned two large imperial centers, one at Susa (modern Khuzistan, southwestern Iran) and the capital city of Persepolis.

The kings aimed to spread Persian peace and honor local heritage, but only if the people were subservient to Achaemenid rule.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, Persian names are rare in Mesopotamian texts before the reign of Darius I, leading scholars to believe that Persian influence on others was minimal before this time, and that natives (i.e., non-Persians) held the governmental and military positions of primary importance early in the Achaemenid era. By holding tight authoritative control over others and unifying the people under his power, Darius created a booming economy that attracted people from other areas. Contributing to this was the creation of a road system, the Royal Road, that united the empire between Sardis and Susa, allowing traders to carry goods from city to city or messengers to relay information at top speed across great distances. This network of roads included a highly efficient relay system with horses and riders at stopping posts, spaced at intervals of a one-day ride so that messages traveled quickly throughout the empire. In addition to its practical uses, the road network may have served as a visual representation of Persia's authoritative extent. The manpower and engineering abilities to build such a road, as well as its affiliation to royal affairs as it connected different imperial centers, would have added to the royal presence throughout the empire, even in the absence of royal figures.

#### *Achaemenid Persia: administration and military affairs*

A variety of people from the empire made up the Persian army.<sup>38</sup> This could include elite figures as well as people drafted for battle. Both the infantry and cavalry made use of bows and arrows and were known for their effective battle tactics involving this weapon, such as

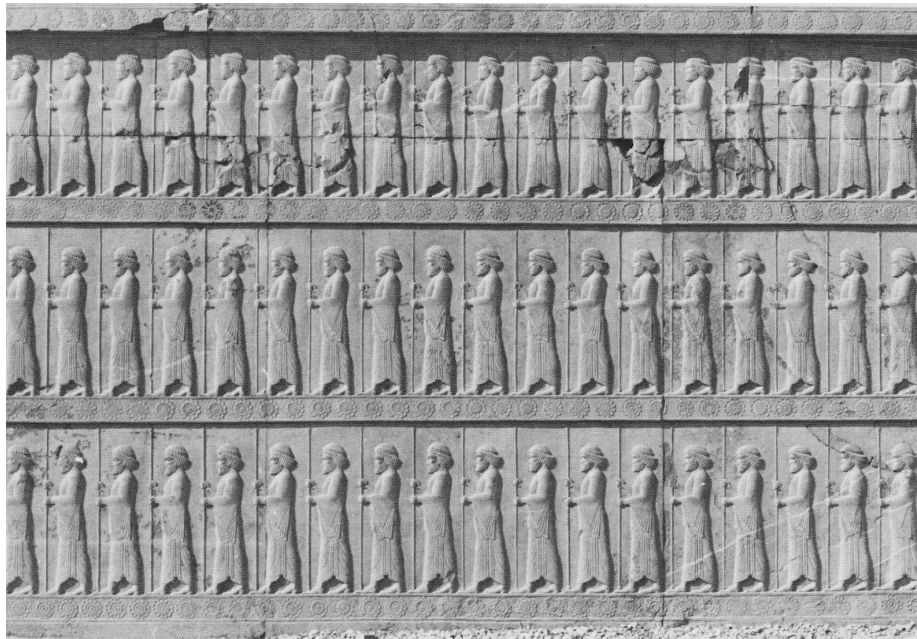
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<sup>37</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Snell, 99, 102, 106; Waters, 111-112; Hdt. 8.98; Dusinger, *Empire, Authority, and Autonomy*, 49.

<sup>38</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Waters, 108-109.

overwhelming enemy forces with a multitude of arrows as the archers held back safely behind shields. This technique was used to legendary effect at the battle of Thermopylae, and archaeological evidence for the tactic may be seen in the vast number of Achaemenid-style trilobate arrowheads embedded in the mudbrick fort protecting the citadel mound of Gordion in Anatolia as well.<sup>39</sup>

The empire obtained soldiers, or mercenaries, from abroad and paid them to fight for the Persian army.<sup>40</sup> But the majority of the army was made of Persians, including the unit known as The Immortals, a standing army that never fell below 10,000 men. This group of infantry may be depicted at Persepolis and Susa (Figure 4 perhaps shows them at Persepolis). If these reliefs do indeed portray The Immortals, they represent two of the very few direct references to Persian warfare in the empire's visual culture.



*Figure 4: Apadana relief, The Immortals*

<sup>39</sup> Hdt. 7.226; Rose, "Introduction, the Archaeology of Phrygian Gordion," 16.

<sup>40</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Snell, 103-104.

It is clear that the empire hired various kinds of workers, as shown by the administrative tablets from Persepolis dating around 500 that detail their wages paid in food and drink.<sup>41</sup> Examples of types of workers included artisans employed at the building program at Persepolis and soldiers who were paid to fight in the army. There is debate surrounding the use of slaves in the empire, and there may not have been many of them.<sup>42</sup> The little good information we have leads us to understand that they held various jobs, such as keeping shops (and paying rent to their owners) or working in households.

The beginning of Darius' reign saw a campaign against the Scythians in Europe that apparently took the Persian army all the way to the banks of the Danube.<sup>43</sup> Toward the end of his rule, the Persians went to war with the Greeks. The Ionian Greeks living in Asia Minor had revolted against Persian rule in 499 and burned at least part of the city of Sardis in Anatolia, the Achaemenid governmental headquarters for that part of the empire. The Ionians were supported by two European Greek states, Athens and Eretria (part of the island of Euboea), but the Ionian revolt was put down in 494. This participation by Athens was one of the reasons given for Darius' attack on the Greek mainland in 490, according to the Greek author Herodotus. That year the Persians captured Eretria but were defeated at the Battle of Marathon as they tried to invade Attica. Xerxes, the successor to the Persian throne after Darius, led the second war between the Greeks and Persians in 480 in person when he invaded Greece. Xerxes and his men defeated the Spartans at Thermopylae and eventually sacked Athens. While initially successful in central Greece, the Persians were defeated on land at the small town of Plataea and in naval battles at Salamis and Mykale.

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<sup>41</sup> Snell, 103. I will soon discuss such texts from the Persepolis Fortification Archive in more detail.

<sup>42</sup> Snell, 103.

<sup>43</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Curtis, *The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia*, 25-26. This attempt against the Scythians, a nomadic group that ranged from eastern Europe across the Central Asian steppes, may partially have been intended as a retaliation against them for slaying Cyrus two generations before.

The Persians may have viewed their wars against the European Greeks in 490 and 480 as attempts to pacify and consolidate the Ionian Greeks as subject peoples of the empire — an effort which ultimately required a division from the Europeans.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the lack of warfare iconography in imperial Achaemenid visual culture and the preference to display an empire at balance was a result and expression of this political ideology. Excessive warfare imagery might have perpetuated the wrong message to the known world by amplifying violent actions instead of decreasing them. Whatever the reason, the reign of Darius was characterized by complex interactions involving the king's military campaigns, his consolidation and strengthening of the empire's sociopolitical structures, and the emphasis in visual rhetoric, as will become clear, on an empire at balance and peace with Darius situated at the center.

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<sup>44</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Snell, 100.

### **Chapter III: Warfare Iconography in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, in Monumental and Glyptic Visual Culture**

This chapter has two focuses related to Neo-Assyrian warfare iconography: monumental visual rhetoric, and imagery in glyptic.<sup>45</sup> By pursuing a specific iconography across media we will see how and where scenes of warfare appeared in the empire. From the material evidence we will learn the following: the Neo-Assyrian kings displayed violent large-scale narrative on their palace walls as propaganda that expressed the ideology of the state; warfare iconography in glyptic was not favored generally throughout the empire; the artists/commissioners of work could depict ethnicity when they wanted (e.g., in monumental scenes) and ignored it when it did not suit their needs (e.g., in glyptic); the few glyptic examples of warfare showed similarities to the monumental depictions of war. These realizations are important to this thesis because they indicate an incongruity in the visual culture of the Neo-Assyrian Empire by highlighting the lack of interest in warfare in glyptic. They also provide details about the empire and its workings through the inclusion of warfare realia and offer a template for depicting military victory that the Achaemenid Persian Empire would eventually reject. Although the empire actively engaged in military affairs, subjugation, and deportation, its kings and citizens did not saturate all media sources with such imagery.

#### ***III.I: Warfare in Monumental Art***

The Neo-Assyrian kings were known for decorating their imperial buildings with large-scale sculptural relief scenes, generally showing the Assyrian king with his army engaged in battle, in animal hunts, and the worship of deities.<sup>46</sup> The artists constructed seven-foot-tall scenes,

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<sup>45</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 22.

<sup>46</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Kuhrt, 32-33, 486; Curtis et al., 72-73, 77; Saggs, *The Might that was Assyria*, 120; Winter, "Art in Empire," 363; Oded, *War, Peace and Empire*, 161. Large-scale palace reliefs became

as well as smaller reliefs in two registers with an inscription running along a panel between the two. In particular, the decorated throne rooms displayed sculpted and inscribed walls that the Assyrian elite and neighboring rulers visited. Not all Assyrians would have viewed the throne room, but the elite would have valued the reliefs as depicting Neo-Assyrian imperial rhetoric. Hayim Tadmor identifies this: “We may assume that, as in religious communities, this elite’s bond of loyalty to the monarch would constantly have been reinforced by reiterating the royal ideology and its persuasive behavior.”<sup>47</sup> In this way we may view the throne room and its decoration as the center of imperial ideology dissemination, a starting point from which the Neo-Assyrian elite and other rulers might have considered the reliefs in order to perpetuate the king’s ideology outside of the palace environment.

Thus, the reliefs served two purposes. First, monumental art showed the many heroic qualities of the king, such as his abilities hunting lions and defeating other armies, at the same time that they overtly displayed his piety. Second, the reliefs spoke for the king through imperial rhetoric so that all who visited his royal rooms received reminders of the violence that would descend on those who misbehaved.

For example, Ashurbanipal IV commissioned a work at Nineveh in the seventh century that shows his complete campaign against the Elamites, known as the Battle of Til-Tuba (Figure 5).<sup>48</sup> It was sculpted in ten slabs and is considered by many the pinnacle of large-scale Assyrian art. The sculpture depicts various encounters between the Assyrian and Elamite armies, explicitly distinguished by their equipment and headgear.<sup>49</sup> In addition to the sculpture, the artists included

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popular during the reign of Ashurnasirpal at Nimrud in the ninth century. From here on most Assyrian palaces displayed this kind of monumental art.

<sup>47</sup> Tadmor, “Propaganda, Literature, Historiography,” 334.

<sup>48</sup> Information about this relief comes from Curtis et al., 72-73, 77; there is no certain date of this war, but it may have occurred between 663 and 653.

<sup>49</sup> The Elamites are distinguished by headbands that tie in the back and are more lightly armored than the Assyrians.



captions for the images as well as freestanding tablets describing the historical events that provided details about the campaign and its sculptural depiction. Indeed the battle scene displayed so much action that one might have used the text as a guide to what happened in the sculpted (and actual) campaign, or viewed the text as an additional sign of power — the harnessing of scribes to such an extent sent its own message of dominance to the viewer.



*Figure 5: Neo-Assyrian palace relief, Battle of Til-Tuba, Nineveh*

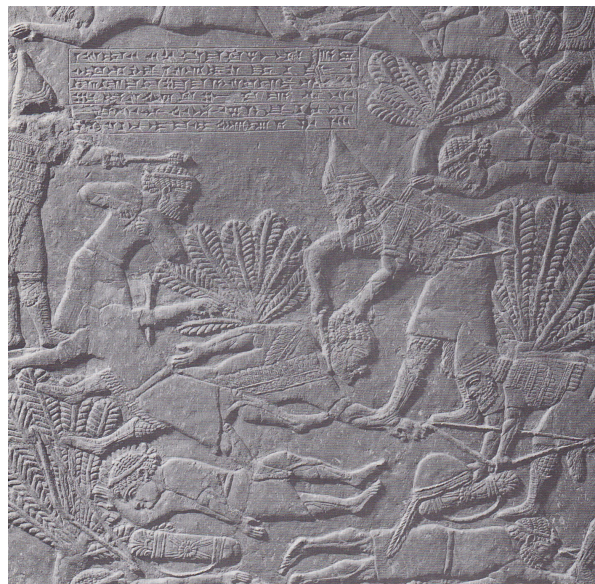
While the overall composition of this relief teems with figures, intended to portray the confusion inherent in battle, certain moments from the campaign are distinguishable and narrate for the viewer actual moments from the events.<sup>50</sup> Thus, for instance, we see the Elamite king, Teumman, and his son, Tammaritu, crashing their chariot (Figure 6). As they flee, an archer shoots Teumman; Tammaritu tries to defend him, but they are eventually killed and decapitated by Assyrians (Figure 7). An Assyrian soldier recovers Teumman's head and circulates it through the battlefield (Figure 8), and later delivers it to Ashurbanipal who displays it hanging from a

<sup>50</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Curtis et al., 72-77.

tree at his “Garden Party” (Figure 9). This war against the Elamites ended with the sacking of Susa, the Elamite capital. As an indication of the power of this imperial art, the faces of the sculpted Assyrians who cut off the Elamites’ heads were defaced, possibly by the Elamites themselves, who (together with the Medes, Scythians, and Babylonians) sacked Nineveh in 612, the year the Neo-Assyrian Empire collapsed.



*Figure 6: Neo-Assyrian palace relief, detail of Battle of Til-Tuba, Nineveh*



*Figure 7: Neo-Assyrian palace relief, detail of Battle of Til-Tuba, Nineveh*





Figure 8: Neo-Assyrian palace relief, detail of Battle of Til-Tuba, Nineveh



Figure 9: Neo-Assyrian palace relief, "Garden Party," Nineveh

To display himself as both pious and militaristic, Ashurbanipal portrayed military victory combined with ritual in this example of monumental art.<sup>51</sup> The so-called "Garden Party," at which he reclines with the Assyrian queen while attendants fan him, includes on the far left of the scene the decapitated head of Teumman, the former Elamite king, hanging from a tree. This served as a constant reminder of Neo-Assyrian military might in the sculpted event. The addition

<sup>51</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Kuhrt, 517.

of the defeated king's head to the peaceful scene allows the viewer to acknowledge the connection between combat and celebration, and to see directly how victory in the former leads to the latter. This scene shows the peace in the empire that resulted from the victory of punishing an enemy's king.

Ashurbanipal did not actually fight Teumman on the battlefield.<sup>52</sup> When he heard that the Elamite king had prepared to go to war against Assyria, he claimed he spoke to the goddess Ishtar about the impending battle and she replied, "Stay here where you belong! Eat bread, drink sesame-beer, prepare joyful music, praise my divinity, while I go, carry out this work (and) let you gain your goal!"<sup>53</sup> The wall relief might illustrate the sentiment of this account from the king's communication with Ishtar. Though the garden scene occurs post-victory, Ashurbanipal appears to be acting out the tasks that Ishtar suggests he complete, and by doing so he aids in as well as benefits from the goddess' deliverance of military success. The relief and the textual account both illustrate the king's connection with a deity in a military context.

This relief serves as one example of the importance of ethnicity in Neo-Assyrian visual culture. It was important to Ashurbanipal that his audience understood that this relief depicted the specific campaign between the Assyrians and the Elamites. Thus ethnicity was a crucial component in his use of narrative. The textual rhetoric of the kings also clearly discussed people of different ethnicities, often with respect to conquered communities, so all understood that the empire held authority over a vast area that encompassed many different cultures and the Neo-Assyrian kings were superior to others from distant places.

Reliefs such as The Battle of Til-Tuba covered interior palace walls and visually proclaimed what the annals, the kings' yearly accounts of their military campaigns, described in

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<sup>52</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Kuhrt, 517.

<sup>53</sup> Piepkorn, *Historical Prism Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal*, Cyl. B, quoted in Kuhrt, 511.



words: Assyrian dominance and the many victories of the king.<sup>54</sup> As previously mentioned, the Assyrians practiced “calculated frightfulness,” and indeed these reliefs are consistent with that technique in that the Assyrian king showed the known world what devastation he and his army were capable of and used imagery as a warning to behave. For example, Figure 10 shows a relief from Nimrud displayed during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727). This relief shows Assyrian archers attacking a city from the right, Assyrian spearmen charging from the left, the city’s people impaled at the top of the scene, and its inhabitants decapitated at the bottom. Monumental art like this piece certainly conveyed Assyrian power over others around the empire and showed explicitly what could happen if they did not submit to the Neo-Assyrian Empire.



*Figure 10: Neo-Assyrian palace relief, Nimrud*

The reliefs, like the annals, used biased rhetoric to record the Assyrian victories; never is a dead Assyrian shown.<sup>55</sup> As discussed already, subordinate nations had great administrative power under the Assyrians, and scholars claim that the Assyrians were no more brutal than

<sup>54</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Kuhrt, 510; Laessoe, 96; Curtis et al., 33.

<sup>55</sup> This paragraph draws on Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art*, 136; Parrot, *The Arts of Assyria*, 40; Curtis et al., 32, 42; Laessoe, 96-97; Kuhrt, 505.

militaries of previous times. If in fact they were not the most violent empire to date, the kings depicted an embellished image of themselves, one in which the empire claimed great violence but in reality did not always practice it. In order to do this, the Assyrian kings and artists created a new artistic genre — “the slow-moving pictorial narrative.”<sup>56</sup> As we saw in the depiction of the Battle of Til-Tuba, the artists showed multiple events within the larger warfare context, allowing for narrative to emerge from its surroundings. This was new for the Near East. We will return to this idea later in a discussion of Neo-Assyrian glyptic art.

By depicting more mundane components of battle (such as soldiers walking with their horses, as opposed to riding them heroically in difficult terrain), the Assyrians lent a sense of reality to the scene that also informs us about their material culture — indeed, often archaeological finds match elements from these reliefs (e.g., armor, equestrian equipment).<sup>57</sup> As Irene Winter points out, such items serve as “verifiers of ‘truth’ of the scene,” since they were “carefully selected to provide the ‘particularity’ of the place and moment.”<sup>58</sup> A specific example comes from the palace at Nineveh, and dates to 700-695 (Figure 11).



Figure 11: Neo-Assyrian palace relief, Nineveh

<sup>56</sup> Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture*, 157.

<sup>57</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Curtis et al., 71; The Met, *Ancient Near Eastern Art*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Winter, “Royal Rhetoric,” 2.

This wall relief shows two positions within the army: archer and spearman. Interestingly, these also represent different peoples from around the empire who contributed to the military. The figure on the left, the archer, is thought to represent a soldier from the Aramaic-speaking area of central Assyria. The figure on the right, the spearman, likely represents a soldier originally from the area around Palestine due to his turban with a headband, long earflaps, and kilt. While this figure shows his distinct heritage, he also carries a shield used by all Assyrian soldiers, indicating that while he stood out in some ways, he was also assimilated into the Assyrian army, as indicated by his state-supplied shield. This is another example of artists depicting ethnicity — or, perhaps, social identity as this figure shows both his native ethnicity and his more recently acquired Assyrian allegiance.

### ***III.II: Images of Warfare in Glyptic***

Neo-Assyrian glyptic art often closely resembles the palace reliefs — those scenes that show the king engaged in ritual activity, fighting animals or hybrid creatures, or worshipping deities.<sup>59</sup> But it is startling to find in this visual corpus an almost complete absence of military scenes. Whereas this favored motif comprises perhaps 90% of the imperial palace reliefs, it makes up perhaps 1% of Neo-Assyrian glyptic art. Indeed, after weeks searching through the thousands of Neo-Assyrian seals and seal impressions published, I have found only seven that show explicit warfare scenes, and two that allude to it.

#### *Glyptic in the State Archives of Assyria*

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<sup>59</sup> This paragraph draws on Collon, “The Kist Collection of seals,” 12; Collon, *First Impressions*, 75.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire practiced successful administration, part of which involved keeping archives that documented transactions and events.<sup>60</sup> The state archives of Assyria that have been excavated date to different kings' reigns; they have been found at various cities and consist of inscribed clay tablets. Some of the texts' topics include taxation, transfer of property, legal proceedings, census reports, deported peoples, feeding and caring for (or shearing and slaughtering) domestic animals, building and land schedules, loans of barley and silver, and lists of horses and military personnel. Often people used sealstones to seal these documents so that the impression left by the seal ratified the transaction or indicated ownership of attached items. Unfortunately, most of the Neo-Assyrian seals discussed here cannot be attributed to specific tablets or archives, and currently remain unaffiliated to any administrative documents. We have two examples of seal impressions on the state archives to discuss here, one from Nineveh and one from Nimrud. These seals were used to leave impressions on an unusual type of archival document, uninscribed clay strips, the purpose of which is not fully understood — but the impressions and the presence of the strips in the archives indicate that these two seals and their users functioned in some capacity in the Neo-Assyrian administration.<sup>61</sup>

The first seal, from Nimrud, shows a battle scene (Figure 12).<sup>62</sup> This image includes a war chariot with a driver and an archer aiming at a falling figure. The scene also has a rhombus and stars floating in the background, as well as horizontal lines framing the top edge of the impression. This seal's iconography is unique for Neo-Assyrian glyptic art, but well represented in the monumental wall reliefs, where the king often hunts from a chariot. It is interesting to

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<sup>60</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Fales and Postgate, *Imperial Administrative Records, Part I*; Dezsó, "Reconstruction of the Assyrian Army," 93; Fales and Jakob-Rost, "*Neo-Assyrian Texts from Assur*."

<sup>61</sup> The function of clay strips is uncertain. During the Neo-Assyrian period the strips displayed only one seal impression, and scholars have presumed that perhaps they served as markers to indicate ownership or identity as a sort of passport, or as test-strips for applying seals. (Herbordt, *Neuassyrische Glyptik*, 68.)

<sup>62</sup> All information about this seal comes from Herbordt, 95, 199.



consider how the image here is not one of the king hunting animals, but instead one of killing a human. We will return shortly to the theme of the king and his chariot in a military context.



Figure 12: Drawing of cylinder seal impression, Nimrud

The second seal from the archives shows multiple components that we have seen in monumental relief: “calculated frightfulness,” a soldier’s activities, and contemporary architecture.<sup>63</sup> This seal impression from Nineveh dates to the early part of the Neo-Assyrian period and shows archers atop towers with an additional archer on the ground, shooting at a figure before him (Figure 13).

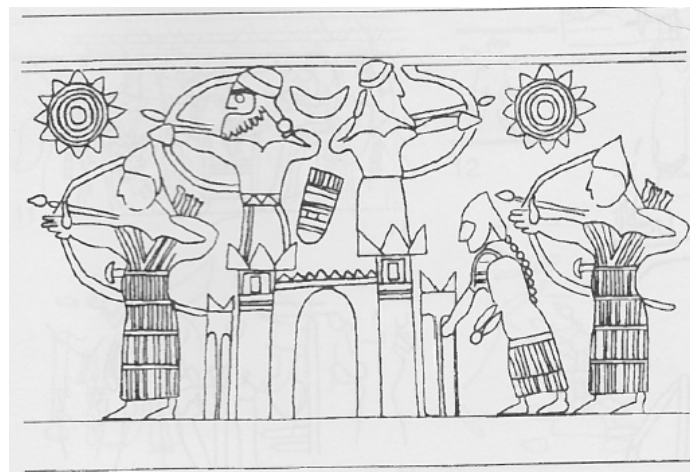


Figure 13: Drawing of cylinder seal impression (drawing by Herbordt), Nineveh

<sup>63</sup> This paragraph draws on Collon, *First Impressions*, 162. The architecture depicted on the seal impression does not indicate what city the Assyrians attacked. This is unlikely an Assyrian city, as the Assyrians most often depicted themselves as the attackers, not as the defenders of a city. The battlements’ crenellations resemble others from earlier Assyrian seals, but Edith Porada points out that the Neo-Assyrians “usually pictured foreign towns much like their own.” (Porada, “Battlements in the Military,” 3.)

It is not difficult to imagine a similar scene portrayed on one of the Neo-Assyrian palace walls, particularly with the archers portrayed larger than life-size, possibly indicating the overwhelming power of Assyrian might, and the archer on the ground about to shoot a victim at close range. If we revisit Figure 10, we see this same technique of portraying the Assyrians larger than life-size; in the wall relief the archers stand not only as tall as the battering rams before them, but nearly as tall as the towers of the city placed atop a hill. When viewing this relief, one is left with no doubt of the power of the Assyrian army. The glyptic representation employed the same techniques, thus demonstrating continuity between warfare scenes in the Neo-Assyrian monumental and glyptic art.

#### *Unprovenanced Representations of Warfare in Glyptic*

Among the unprovenanced examples of warfare in glyptic we find another seal impression that closely resembles the monumental warfare scenes and the seal in Figure 12.<sup>64</sup> It has been dated to c. 800-700 and shows a man in a chariot running over a human victim with flanking palm trees and numinous figures hovering above (Figure 14). There are a total of five known Neo-Assyrian seals bearing such a scene, and I describe only one here as representative of this small group. Compare this seal to the monumental scene in Figure 15 in which Ashurnasirpal, holding a bow and arrow, rides over an enemy victim in his chariot. The image of an Assyrian running over an enemy finds its parallel in the imperial rhetoric. Ashurnasirpal described himself as a “strong male who treads upon the necks of his foes, trampler of all enemies.”<sup>65</sup> The iconography displayed by this seal mirrors the self-proclaimed physical strength of the king.

<sup>64</sup> Information in this paragraph about this seal comes from Teissier, 39-40.

<sup>65</sup> Grayson, RIMA 2 194, 0.101.1 i 14-15, quoted in Westenholz, “The King, the Emperor, and the Empire.” 114.



*Figure 14: Cylinder seal impression*



*Figure 15: Neo-Assyrian palace relief, Nimrud*

### *Allusions to Warfare in Glyptic*

If we look outside of purely combat scenes on sealstones, we find a few more examples of the military in the Neo-Assyrian period.<sup>66</sup> For example, Figure 16 shows an impression from a ninth-eighth century sealstone from Nimrud.

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<sup>66</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Albenda, "Of Gods, Men and Monsters," 18, 22.



*Figure 16: Cylinder seal impression, Nimrud*

A king (figure on right) stands at a table, a bow in front of him, and engages in ritual worship. The figure across from him has a sword at his side and a shield on his back, presented in profile to display the shield's spikes, a type of shield that also appears in the palace reliefs. By holding a bow the king indicated his military authority in a manner similar to the powerful Neo-Assyrian archers in Figure 13, as well as Ashurnasirpal aiming his bow and arrow in Figure 15. Figure 17 shows a relief from Nimrud with Ashurnasirpal II (figure on the left) holding a bow like the king in Figure 16. Like the figure on the seal, Ashurnasirpal on the relief is also accompanied by a figure — but in this case a figure holding a flywhisk, whereas on the sealstone the attendant holds a fan. The two men on the seal, like those on the sculpted reliefs, participate in a ceremony to celebrate a successful battle.



*Figure 17: Neo-Assyrian palace relief, Nimrud*

Ritual associated with victory celebration also appears on a seal dating to c. 850-700 (Figure 18).<sup>67</sup> Here we see a scene similar to that of the seal in Figure 16. The spiked-shield appears again, this time a much larger one and of the sort used during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727). It is important to point out that scenes similar to these appear in Neo-Assyrian glyptic art both with and without military connotations. For example, a ninth century sealstone depicts a ritual meal (Figure 19) that very closely resembles the scene previously discussed in Figure 16 but without the shield. In this instance the king sits at a table, still on the right side, with an attendant standing opposite him and holding a fan, but there is no reference to combat. The variation in the use of this ritual scene indicates that the Neo-Assyrian seal users and artists had the option of imbuing a scene with military connotations. Thus the scenes that do allude to the military take on added significance, as banquets need not involve elements connecting the king to his military role. The military ritual scenes showed rare and unique iconography.

<sup>67</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Teissier, 36; Porada, "Why Cylinder Seals?" 579.





*Figure 18: Cylinder seal impression*



*Figure 19: Cylinder seal impression*

## Chapter IV: Neo-Assyrian Imperial and Archival Texts

The textual evidence from the Neo-Assyrian Empire is great and varied.<sup>68</sup> Surviving from antiquity are building inscriptions, treaties, receipts, myths, military accounts, legal documents, dedications, building plans, and oaths, just to name a few. I detail below only some of these sources, namely the kings' annals, building inscriptions, and archival documents that discuss the military. From these sources we gain a glimpse at imperial rhetoric, its style and content, and are led to a deeper understanding of the empire as a whole.

### *Imperial Rhetoric: the king and the divine*

As indicated by the imperial rhetoric, the Neo-Assyrian kings campaigned so that Ashur would be considered the foremost of all gods.<sup>69</sup> In this way the battles themselves were the battles of the deity, not only of the kings, thus perpetuating the need for continuous campaigns — these were religious duties. According to Assyrian thought, a king's military victory was the result of his selection by the god to be king;<sup>70</sup> moreover, in some cases Ashur determined whether battles occurred at all.<sup>71</sup> There was such emphasis put on the Neo-Assyrian king's felicitous connection with the god, as shown through his military successes, that H.F. Lutz discusses the king "as the *pontifex maximus*. Kingship and priestship are in fact synonymous terms in Assyria."<sup>72</sup> When the Assyrian king claimed a victory he honored the gods, as well as displayed prisoners of war and the severed heads of previous rivals so that people throughout the

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<sup>68</sup> From only the last hundred years of the Neo-Assyrian Empire there exists about 1,500 letters written among the kings at Nineveh. (Laessoe, 95)

<sup>69</sup> This paragraph draws on Laessoe, 96; Stiebing, 273; Kuhrt, 481, 511.

<sup>70</sup> Sargon II explains in his annals how the god led to his victory: "At the begi[nning] of my royal rule, I...the town of the Sama[r]ians [I besieged, conquered] (2 lines destroyed) [for the god...who le]t me achieve (this) my triumph..." (Lie, quoted in Pritchard, *Volume I*, 195.)

<sup>71</sup> Sargon II says in his annals that Ashur sent him to battle: "Upon a trust(-inspiring oracle given by) my lord Ashur, I crushed the tribes of Tamud, Ibadidi, Marsimanu, and Haiapa, the Arabs who live, far away, in the desert..." (Lie, quoted in Pritchard, *Volume I*, 196.)

<sup>72</sup> Lutz, "Kingship in Babylonia, Assyria," 446.

empire saw battle and worship as one process, the victory of the king as the result of his piety. The kings' texts will illuminate this relationship.

#### ***IV.I: The Kings' Annals***

The kings wrote about their many military victories (in the first person) in their annals, the yearly reports of campaigns that each Assyrian king documented, starting with Arik-den-ili around 1300.<sup>73</sup> This type of military documentation, in which scribes detailed a single campaign's events, is considered an Assyrian invention. The kings commissioned the records as public monuments as they positioned them on rocks or stelae at the area of the detailed campaign or at imperial centers. This meant that they were written for display. In addition, they appeared on other surfaces, often of clay, such as tablets and cylinders, or on stone slabs erected in temples or royal buildings where a literate audience could read them or have the text recited to them. It must be noted that the annals only discussed what the king approved, and therefore express a consciously constructed view of the kings and their military successes.

One particularly revealing example of the king and his rhetoric comes from a report by Sargon II (721-705):

Iamani from Ashdod, afraid of my armed force (lit.: weapons), left his wife and children and fled to the frontier of M[usru] which belongs to Meluhha (i.e., Ethiopia) and hid (lit.: stayed) there like a thief. I installed an officer of mine as governor over his entire large country and its prosperous inhabitants, (thus) aggrandizing (again) the territory belonging to Ashur, the king of the gods. The terror(-inspiring) glamour of Ashur, my lord, overpowered (i.e., Iamani) in fetters on hands and feet, and sent him to me, to Assyria...<sup>74</sup>

Here Sargon II mentions his fear-inducing army and his political approach to consolidating and ruling others. Additionally, he makes clear his ability to expand his empire both for Ashur and

<sup>73</sup> Information for this paragraph comes Laessoe, 95; Kuhrt, 479; Hoskisson et al., "Neo-Assyrian Rhetoric," 66; Grayson, "Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," 37-39.

<sup>74</sup> Lie, quoted in Pritchard, *Volume I*, 196.



because of Ashur, so that one understood Sargon and the god's joint role in the victory not only of this battle, but in the victory of expanding the empire. This collaboration demonstrated to all people, both the Assyrian populace and its captives, that the king worked for and with the god and thus made imperial conquest a divine act. By connecting conquest with piety, the king justified his demand for subjugation by making it a religious duty. This resembles the necessity of the king to honor the gods post-battle — a divinely dictated practice.

The visual “calculated frightfulness” that elicited fear described already is also evident in imperial verbal rhetoric, particularly when the kings discuss punishing foreigners for disrespecting Ashur and breaking oaths against Assyria. Ashurbanipal referred to this:

Disaster broke out among them so that they ate the flesh of their children to keep from starving. All the curses which are written in the oath in the naming of my name and those of the gods, you (sc. The god) decreed from them exactly as their terrible destiny.... The people in Arabia asked each other: ‘Why has such a dis[aster] fallen on [Arabia]?’ – ‘Because we [did not abide by the great] o[aths] of Ashur, [sin]ned against the kindness of A[shurbani]pal, [the king]...’<sup>75</sup>

Oaths were morally binding because they were sworn before both the Assyrian gods as well as the gods of the people swearing the oath. From this idea and the above text we learn that the people of Arabia were punished for disobeying Ashur, the Arabian gods, and the Neo-Assyrian king. The kings saw the breaking of an oath as a threat to Assyrian harmony, and in this way oath-breakers were considered “embodiments of godless evil and allies of chaos.”<sup>76</sup>

#### ***IV.II: Monumental Inscriptions***

It can be difficult to distinguish between a king's annals and his monumental inscriptions, because often they display one and the same text.<sup>77</sup> Sometimes the kings displayed their annals in

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<sup>75</sup> Weippert, ‘Die Kämpfe des assyrischen Königs, 74ff. Ep. 2, quoted in Kuhrt, 515.

<sup>76</sup> Kuhrt, 516.

<sup>77</sup> Even some of the modern literature on these texts does not distinguish between an annalistic text and a monumental inscription.

public spaces, thus complicating the distinction between the two sources of material. For this reason it is important to consider both as public rhetoric and to remember that ancient texts as well as images could serve as public rhetoric.

Verbal imperial rhetoric often highlighted the ruler's legitimacy as king, his wide-reaching rule over others, and his many accomplishments in combat and construction or building projects. One example of such rhetoric is found (inter al.) on a stele placed at the entrance to Ashurnasirpal's throne room in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, a version of his frequently reiterated Standard Inscription:<sup>78</sup>

This is the palace of Ashurnasirpal, the high priest of Ashur...the legitimate king, the king of the world, the king of Assyria, son of Tukulti-Ninurta, great king, legitimate king, king of the world, king of Assyria (who was) the son of Adad-nirari, likewise great king, legitimate king, king of the world and king of Assyria — heroic warrior who always acts upon trust-inspiring signs given by his lord Ashur and (therefore) has no rival among the rulers of the four quarters (of the world).<sup>79</sup>

This is a typical introduction to the king's imperial text: he describes his legitimacy in terms of both the will of the gods and his heredity. It is not enough to claim that he is the king of Assyria and of the world, but he must make it clear that those before him held the same authority.

Next Ashurnasirpal must describe the extent of his rule over others:

...the king who subdues the unsubmissive (and) rules over all mankind; the king who always acts upon trust-inspiring signs given by his lords, the great gods, and therefore has personally conquered all countries; who has acquired dominion over the mountain regions and received their tribute; he takes hostages, triumphs over all the countries from beyond the Tigris to the Lebanon and the Great Sea, he has

<sup>78</sup> A king's Standard Inscription served as a summary of his many good qualities, such as his aptitude in extensive building, his military strength, his royal lineage, his piety, and his expansion of the empire. Since the reliefs depict the king in such activities, Winter suggests that "rather than seeing the text — Annals or Standard Inscription — behind the images [they were carved directly into and around the relief scenes], they should be seen as separate but parallel systems, particularly as we are concerned with an essentially nonliterate population." (Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 18.)

<sup>79</sup> Translation by A. Leo Oppenheim, in Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Volume II*, 99; The king's Standard Inscription appeared in many places throughout his palace at Nimrud. There are more than 400 known examples of this text and over 200 of them are still in situ, and the text influenced other examples of imperial rhetoric. (Taylor, "Fragments of History," *Materialities of Assyrian Knowledge Production*. Accessed February 25, 2014.)

brought into submission the entire country of Laqe and the region of Suhu as far as the town of Rapiqu; personally he conquered (the region) from the sources of the Subnat River to Urartu.<sup>80</sup>

Not only does Ashurnasirpal make clear that he rules a vast land, he assures the audience that he achieved this personally thanks to his great military might. The vastness of the Assyrian Empire was his accomplishment. We might view other imperial rhetoric, the kings' annals and monumental reliefs, as expanding on these sentiments because they describe specific events that led to this result of world domination.

Also in the Standard Inscription, before Ashurnasirpal describes how he came to build at Nimrud, he makes the following statement: "Ashur, the Great Lord, has chosen me and made a pronouncement concerning my world rule with his own holy mouth: Ashurnasirpal is the king whose fame is power!"<sup>81</sup> Perhaps we could read this as the king's acknowledgement of his own reputation and his appointment to the throne by Ashur. In fact his name, Ashurnasirpal, translates to "the god Ashur is the protector of the heir."<sup>82</sup> Thus the verbal rhetoric matches the images at the palaces that depict the king in specific military victories, as well as in generic pious reverence so that the imperial rhetoric is consistent throughout the numerous expressions of the king's ideology.

#### ***IV.III: Texts of The State Archives of Assyria***

The state archives are made up of various storehouses of documents from around the empire. They include a variety of texts, such as administrative receipts, mythological tales, and judicial procedures. The texts I discuss here are exclusively from around Nineveh and date to the Neo-Assyrian period. Some of the administrative records discuss the military or aspects of it, such as weaponry. I include below the instances of such topics as a representative list, rather than

<sup>80</sup> Translation by A.T. Olmstead, in Pritchard, *Volume II*, 99-100.

<sup>81</sup> Translation by A.T. Olmstead, in Pritchard, *Volume II*, 100.

<sup>82</sup> [http://www.ancient.eu.com/Ashurnasirpal\\_II/](http://www.ancient.eu.com/Ashurnasirpal_II/), accessed March 8, 2014.

exhaustive, of the administrative rhetoric and its inclusion of military matters. Of the 219 archival texts that I had access to, thirty (approximately 13%) include some mention of the military or items associated with it.<sup>83</sup> None describes an actual battle or military encounter.

### *SAS: chariots*

Texts referring to chariots are the most common among the tablets bearing some military reference. Fully twenty-three of the thirty archival texts (approximately 76%) mention chariots, chariotry, chariot-builders, chariot-drivers, chariot-fighters, or chariot-horse-trainers. The context for such texts with chariots include lists of officials at court (mentioned by name),<sup>84</sup> lists of lodging for officials including chariot drivers and owners,<sup>85</sup> notes of foreign governors,<sup>86</sup> lists of professions,<sup>87</sup> chariot and cavalry for ceremonial banquets,<sup>88</sup> an itemized account of linen used to make clothing for chariot-fighters and archers,<sup>89</sup> chariots carrying items to temple offerings for Ashur,<sup>90</sup> and a survey of palace officials including “x hundred” chariot-fighters.<sup>91</sup> These texts indicate that chariot-related matters were important in the administrative environment and appeared in a variety of situations.

### *SAS: weaponry and armor*

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<sup>83</sup> Lack of time and access to out of print publications of these archives precluded the compiling of a complete account of the Neo-Assyrian military in its record keeping. For this study I have consulted only Fales and Postgate, *SAS VII: Imperial Administrative Record Part I*. There are certainly additional textual instances of the military in the Neo-Assyrian State Archives.

<sup>84</sup> <sup>20</sup> Mušeziḫ-Aššu[r, chario]t driver; <sup>27</sup> Bel-nasir-..., chariot owner; (List of Officials at Court 5, in *SAS VII*, 8-11. See also List of Officials 6, 7 for additional examples.)

<sup>85</sup> List of Lodgings for Officials 9, in *SAS VII*, 16-19.

<sup>86</sup> Note of Foreign Governors and Others 15, in *SAS VII*, 25.

<sup>87</sup> <sup>11</sup> total, 5 horse trainers of the king's chariots. (List of People of Various Professions 18, in *SAS VII*, 26-27).

<sup>88</sup> <sup>08</sup> 2, Ninevite chariot drivers; <sup>09</sup> 2, ditto “third men”; (reverse) <sup>04</sup> 2, Assyrian, prefects of the cavalry... (Accounts from Ceremonial Banquet 149, in *SAS VII*, 155-156. See also 150, 152, 155.)

<sup>89</sup> <sup>19</sup> 2 talents for [...] of the chariot-fighters (and) for the cloak(s) of the archers. (Account of Flax and Wool 115, in *SAS VII*, 121-125.)

<sup>90</sup> <sup>04</sup> Of 2 oxen: the stomachs, the livers, the kidneys, hearts. <sup>02</sup> In two chariots, care of Aššur-ahhe-eriba. (Aššur Temple Offerings, Day 23 193, in *SAS VII*, 186. See also 212.)

<sup>91</sup> <sup>02</sup> [x hundred, the horse train]ers of the open chariotry; <sup>04</sup> [x hundred, the ch]ariot fighters; (Survey of Palace Officials 21, in *SAS VII*, 28.)

There are also archival texts that record various warfare paraphernalia. For example, we read about weapons such as daggers that underwent repair,<sup>92</sup> a breastpiece of gold,<sup>93</sup> yokes and shields of silver stored in one wooden chest,<sup>94</sup> and work completed on copper arms such as quivers and spears.<sup>95</sup> One particularly illuminating text details such items: “1 bow-case...of silver, on a vase, (with) star-shaped ornaments and bird’s eyes.”<sup>96</sup> The same text includes additional elite items such as ivory, necklaces, silver, and gold, and one necklace of doves made from six minas and thirty-three shekels of white gold. This is a valuable text as it mentions the detail on armor and its relation to other expensive goods. It appears from this small sample of archival texts that the armor and weaponry mentioned belonged to the elite or may have been purely ceremonial in function, as suggested by the appearance of silver and gold in the accounts.

#### *SAS: military rank*

As we have seen already there are mentions of military positions in the texts, for example chariot owner, chariot driver, horse trainer, cavalry, archer, bowman and shield-bearer.<sup>97</sup> It is interesting to note that the last two positions, bowman and shield-bearer, appear as figures in a text that details outstanding debts. In other words, in this administrative context, one’s position in the military mattered to the scribes and archival personnel so that they were listed according to their military profession. This one text includes shield-bearers, bowmen, cavalry, corral-men,

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<sup>92</sup> <sup>01</sup> 2 star-shaped ornaments of the base of quivers, 10 5/6 shekels in weight; <sup>04</sup> total, 1 mina 7 1/6 shekels of gold on 2 old quivers. <sup>06</sup> 4 star-shaped ornaments of the...s of 2 large bows, 19 shekels of gold in weight. <sup>09</sup> 1 1/3 shekel for re[pa]ir for the bath [...], of the dagger [...]; (Record of Precious Items 63, in *SAS VII*, 84.)

<sup>93</sup> <sup>20</sup> 1 necklace of..., 1 breastpiece; its 1...of gold; (Inventory of Precious Items 72, in *SAS VII*, 91-92.)

<sup>94</sup> <sup>07</sup> 8 shields of silver; <sup>08</sup> 4 yoke finials of silver; the scraps of silver are together (with it)... (Record of Storage of Precious Items 78, in *SAS VII*, 95-95.)

<sup>95</sup> <sup>01</sup> Wooden q[ui]vers; <sup>11</sup> A case for spears, of iron; <sup>12</sup> coverings of leather, including their precious stones, firmly fixed. (Record of Work on Copper Items 89, in *SAS VII*, 103.)

<sup>96</sup> <sup>01</sup> 1 bow-case...of silver, on a base, (with) star-shaped ornaments and bird’s eyes: entrusted to Marduk-šarru-usur.

<sup>16</sup> 1 pector[al,...] (Record of Precious Items 64, in *SAS VII*, 85-86.)

<sup>97</sup> (reverse) <sup>06</sup> 11 shield (bearer)s, at the disposal of N[N], chief [...]. <sup>19</sup> 17 bow(men), at the disposal of Nabû-eriba, prefect of the crown prince. (List of Various Debts 30, in *SAS VII*, 41-43.)

farmers, and staff-bearers.<sup>98</sup> We might take this as evidence that a bowman, for example, had a fulltime job in the military the way a farmer would have a fulltime job in the fields and that occupation might have represented an individual in this administrative environment.

Unfortunately, many of these texts are poorly preserved, and due to the list-like nature of them, it is difficult to discern much beyond the existence of the items and military positions. While I know of no reports concerning specific military events or tactics, as opposed to the kings' annals, most often the archives' texts refer to imperial matters so the documents offer insight into court demographics and happenings. It is therefore significant that the texts highlight such details of military items and personnel, even if only in list form, because it confirms a true presence of the military within Neo-Assyrian society since they deal with the realia and personnel of warfare.

### *Conclusion*

The Neo-Assyrian Empire became the world's largest due to its military reform and its military successes. It maintained control via various ideological channels, including the use of propagandistic art. The kings commissioned an artistic program with great nuance, and when we investigate the use of warfare iconography across artistic media we see the different ways in which people treated it. This iconography's prevalence in the monumental imagery offers a drastic contrast to its near absence in the glyptic art. Images of human domination seem not to have appealed to non-royal individuals, who had seen the violent propaganda that the kings commissioned. However, the few individuals who did select such iconography did so in ways consistent to the public visual culture as they showed both the action and peaceful aftermath of battle.

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<sup>98</sup> Probable List of Debts 30, in *SAS VII*, 41-43.

The empire's archival texts illuminate some of the more mundane aspects of administration and government and also offer us some notion of the military's presence in daily life and even in royal contexts. We read of people identified by their military role (e.g., chariot driver), and the proportions of such figures at royal banquets. Fully 13% of the archival sample considered here mentions the military in some respect.

The ethnicity of the figures involved in combat is of additional significance to a study of warfare iconography. In the palace reliefs the artists depicted specific military campaigns, and indeed one can identify whom the Neo-Assyrian king opposed. Ethnicity was apparent and mattered. On their seals, however, one cannot determine the ethnicity of the figures. This marks an inconsistency in the artistic rendering of ethnicity and individuals within the empire. As we saw also in the textual evidence, ethnicity was significant to the impact of imperial rhetoric. By naming the peoples whom the king controlled, he indicated to his audience how widespread his rule was. Apparently this specificity mattered less to the individuals who commissioned or purchased seals with the iconography of warfare, who seemed rather to prefer the generic to the specific.

André Parrot reminds us that the Neo-Assyrian Empire created a state-approved rhetorical program, involving both scribes and sculptors, as shown by the consistent theme of Assyrian victory shared between the annals and palace reliefs.<sup>99</sup> He contends that this is “one of the reasons why Assyrian art never moves us; it is too persistently ‘directed,’ dutifully stereotyped. We feel it is committed to the task of enhancing the king's prestige and representing him as a superhuman all of whose deeds were prodigies of valor and statesmanship.”<sup>100</sup> I address here Neo-Assyrian art's direction (toward its subjugated people), but not the art's power over us

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<sup>99</sup> Parrot, 12-13.

<sup>100</sup> Parrot 12-13.

and its ability to move the modern viewer. It is important to acknowledge that whether or not it moves us today, it had to be “persistently directed” in order to control a vast empire in antiquity. Perhaps this helps us to understand the glyptic choices the Neo-Assyrians made, and why the iconography used by individuals and offices on seals largely strayed from the monumental images of the palace reliefs. Did the people to whom the “calculated frightfulness” was directed have no desire to use a sealstone with such oppressive images? As a result of these artistic choices, we see one example of how a militaristic society used combat imagery in one medium and nearly entirely ignored it in another, reminding us that imperial rhetoric varies in regard to iconography and medium, but that it serves its audience at the time it is created.



## Chapter V: Warfare Iconography in the Achaemenid Persian Empire

This chapter focuses on monumental and glyptic visual culture during the reign of Darius I (522-486). Margaret Root tells us that the reign of Darius I marked the beginning of Achaemenid imperial art:

By the end of Darius' reign, the basic formulae for royal inscriptions had been established; and a basic repertoire of imperial architectural, sculptural and glyptic types had been created and codified.... It is clear that the years covering the reign of Cyrus through the reign of Darius represent the definitive phase of creative imperial effort in the Achaemenid Period...Extant representations of the king and kingship planned after the reign of Darius are adapted copies of motifs already devised in an earlier era.<sup>101</sup>

It is with this perspective that we ought to consider the adoption, or lack thereof, of warfare iconography in Achaemenid visual culture. The environment in the empire during this king's rule was conducive to the creation of particular iconographical motifs and emphases in monumental art and in the glyptic medium, setting trends that would continue through the Achaemenid era.

The material evidence that I focus on here includes three major Achaemenid Persian monuments — the rock relief and inscription at Behistun, the Apadana at Persepolis, and the royal tombs at Naqsh-e-Rostam — as well as provenanced seals from Persepolis. As in Chapter III, the emphasis is on warfare imagery and its role (or lack thereof) in Persepolitan visual culture. From this sample of imagery we will see the following: how the Persian imperial (monumental) rhetoric differed from the glyptic by allowing for fewer (i.e., zero) images of combat; Darius' view of the world (as expressed through monumental art) which emphasized unique aspects of victory; the Persian artists' (or the seal users') preference for depicting ethnicity in the glyptic medium, and that those few individuals who chose warfare iconography preferred a depiction of Persian power through explicit combat, instead of through the portrayal of unity and peace as the results of war.

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<sup>101</sup> Root, *The King and Kingship*, 40.

While the main focus of this thesis is warfare iconography at Persepolis, it is important to contextualize it in the artistic environment during the period under review, and therefore the non-Persepolitan examples (Behistun and Naqsh-e Rostam) serve as important comparanda to understand Persepolis and its iconography, just as the unprovenanced Neo-Assyrian seals were important to my earlier discussion. Perhaps their greatest contribution to this study is the fact that none of these places, Persepolis or otherwise, provide any explicit warfare imagery. Interestingly, non-monumental art will scarcely provide more examples for us, though there are a few to consider. The Persian monuments discussed below illuminate Achaemenid royal ideology and its visual expression in large-scale imperial art so that we may compare it to the glyptic examples of warfare iconography found at Persepolis, a corpus of evidence that does include warfare imagery on a small scale.

### ***V.I: Imperial Visual Style and the King's Monuments***

The Persian administration created an eclectic artistic style by using artists and laborers from throughout the vast empire both in its art and architecture.<sup>102</sup> This resulted in a unique imperial style that, over only one generation, formed from the many cultures within the empire. As Dominique Collon states, “they [the Achaemenid Persian kings] were repeating the feat of the Akkadians almost two millennia earlier, and using art as an instrument of royal propaganda with the message ‘this is Akkadian’ or ‘this is Achaemenid,’ still recognizable today.”<sup>103</sup> As will be discussed, the subject of the royal art, or propaganda, is vastly different in the Persian Empire than those before it and presents a unique way of viewing kingship and empire.

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<sup>102</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art*, 177, 187.

<sup>103</sup> Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art*, 187.

One reason for the creation of Achaemenid art is that the Persians rapidly took over the known world.<sup>104</sup> This resulted in an accelerated process of creating an imperial visual rhetoric to reflect the king's ideology. The borrowing of other artistic ideas as other peoples came under Persian power aided this creation of visual culture. As Root says,

[The "court style" art of Persepolis] must have been devised specifically to answer a perceived need for a style expressive of the official imperial ideology. This ideology stressed unity out of diversity, cooperation, and ecumenical harmony among peoples of a vast polyglot empire. Thus, the style created to epitomize the ideology in visual terms incorporates strands of several great cultures. Like the peoples of the empire, the artistic traditions embraced by the imperial program were vital.<sup>105</sup>

The Achaemenid monumental art displays this ideology effectively by avoiding visual representations of conflict. As we will see, all three of the monuments discussed here highlight "unity out of diversity," and urge people to belong to the empire. Achaemenid art encouraged subject peoples to fit into this vast empire, and one way of doing that was maintaining the native peoples' identity and showing a world at balance despite and even due to its diversity.

Like their predecessors, the Achaemenid Persian kings also presented a constructed image of themselves through imperial propaganda in monumental art.<sup>106</sup> Near Eastern tradition often dictated that the king show his might to others by displaying his conquest of people. The Achaemenid kings strayed from this tradition in the monumental medium by neglecting explicit scenes of warfare, and opting instead to show an idealized version of the empire full of reverence and order.

### *Behistun: an overview*

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<sup>104</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Curtis, 100.

<sup>105</sup> Root, "Circles of Artistic Programming," 134.

<sup>106</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Root, *The King and Kingship*, 2, 131.

The great sculpted relief and trilingual inscription at Behistun were carved 100 meters high on a cliff looking out over a road running from Hamadan (ancient Ecbatana) to Babylon.<sup>107</sup> It is now commonly believed that Darius I seized the throne as an imposter, an element of his reign that highly influences how we ought to view the monumental art and inscriptions he commissioned. Behistun is one such monument, as its inscription describes the beginning of Darius' reign and how he consolidated his power as king. It is the only monumental representation of human dominance and implied combat from the Achaemenid period. This victory monument is additionally unique due to its status as the only known Achaemenid historical narrative: the sculpted relief portrays in abbreviated fashion the events that the accompanying inscription describes. This is the first and only time an Achaemenid king commissioned a work that told of real events with a pictorial depiction of the narrative.

*Behistun: royal sculpture*

The sculpture shows enemy kings standing together, bound to one another by ropes around their necks, while Darius, holding a bow, appears ahead of them with one foot atop Gaumata, an imposter attempting to seize the throne, who lies on the ground (Figure 20).<sup>108</sup> Each figure is labeled by inscription so that the audience has no doubt about who rebelled against the new king, and we see Darius as at least a whole head taller than the rest. A figure emerging from a winged disk, possibly the great god Ahuramazda, hovers overhead as a supreme deity. Columns of text describe Darius' victory over Gaumata and the nine kings who rebelled against him, and explain how he overcame the rebellions and killed the rebellious captives.

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<sup>107</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Curtis, 24; Root, *The King and Kingship*, 184-185; Boardman, *Persia and the West*, 104.

<sup>108</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Curtis, 23-24; Root, *The King and Kingship*, 185-187.

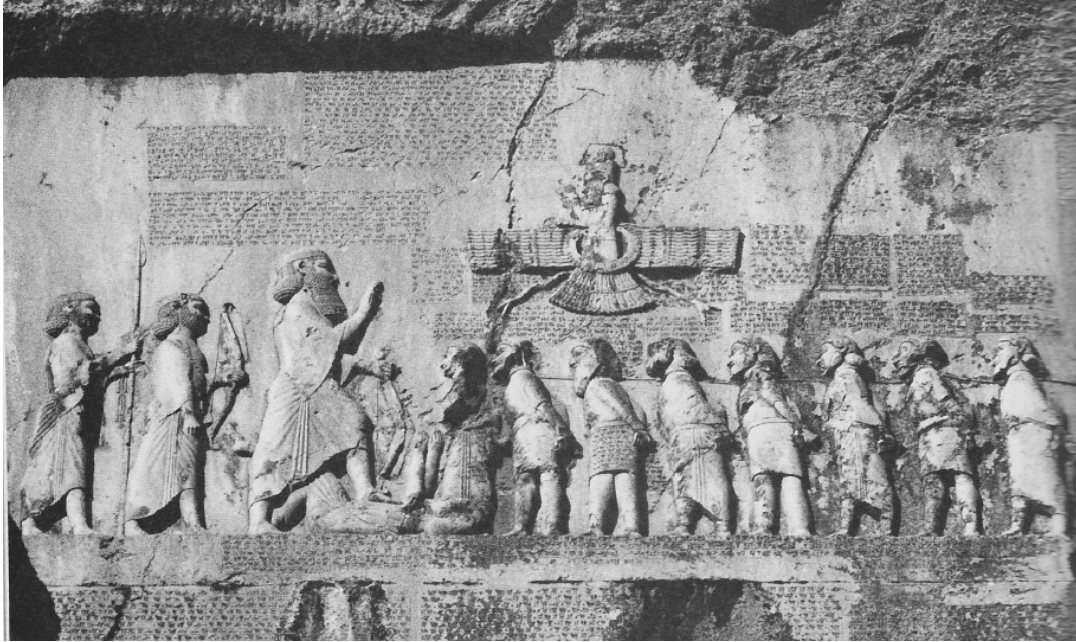


Figure 20: Relief at Behistun

Root points out that the sculptors could have depicted Darius' message differently, perhaps in a manner similar to the way in which the Neo-Assyrian kings illustrated their annals with violent detail.<sup>109</sup> But they chose not to. Uniquely, Darius compressed multiple events into a single scene at Behistun to create a sort of summarized account of happenings from different places. The Persian sculptors did not portray the violence involved in the capture and murder of the rebellious kings, merely demonstrating the successful conclusion of the various campaigns by means of a rope around the necks of the conquered rebels. Darius made the choice to show his ability to rule not with graphic portrayals of physical violence, but with a sense of dignity. Root points out that the captives at Behistun do not look particularly degraded — they are fully clothed, and aside from being bound, have not yet been harmed — and each figure's status is distinguished by height, rather than by more gruesome humiliation. This is the closest we will ever come to viewing Achaemenid Persian warfare in the monumental sphere.

<sup>109</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Root, *The King and Kingship*, 193-194, 215-217.

Though Darius had the opportunity to depict combat, he chose only to imply the physical dominance involved in securing his kingship, not the violent acts themselves.<sup>110</sup> This may indicate that explicit warfare iconography had no place in Persian monumental art. According to Root,

The Behistun relief may reflect a deliberate attempt to suggest sculpturally that the Persian king was the successor, in terms of military might, of the Assyrian kings...The Assyrian stylization may have been consciously selected as an important aspect of the Behistun relief because of a connection in the Achaemenids' minds between the creation of emphatic displays of military power and the tradition of the mighty Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal.<sup>111</sup>

This suggestion stems from the similarities in the physical appearance of Darius, particularly in his hairstyle and face, to Sargon and Ashurbanipal. Figure 21 shows a comparison: the head on the left belongs to Darius at Behistun, and the head on the right belongs to Ashurbanipal at Nineveh.

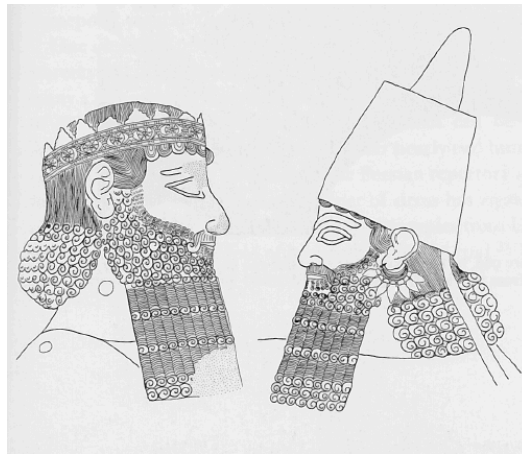


Figure 21: Drawings of Darius I and Ashurbanipal IV

Also, the Persian ruler holds a bow similar to those held by Sargon and Ashurbanipal, and he wears a court robe like those worn by Ashurbanipal's retinue on his palace walls. How interesting that in an attempt to show his military prowess, Darius excludes the most explicit components of warfare emphasized by his Neo-Assyrian predecessors in favor of minor details

<sup>110</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Root, *The King and Kingship*, 193-194, 215-217

<sup>111</sup> Root, *The King and Kingship*, 215.

such as clothing and facial features. This indicates that the scenes of warfare utilized by the Neo-Assyrian kings to show their military successes and promote imperial dominance did not hold the same meaning for the Achaemenid Persian kings. Instead it is the way in which a king appeared physically that mattered.

*Persepolis: an overview*

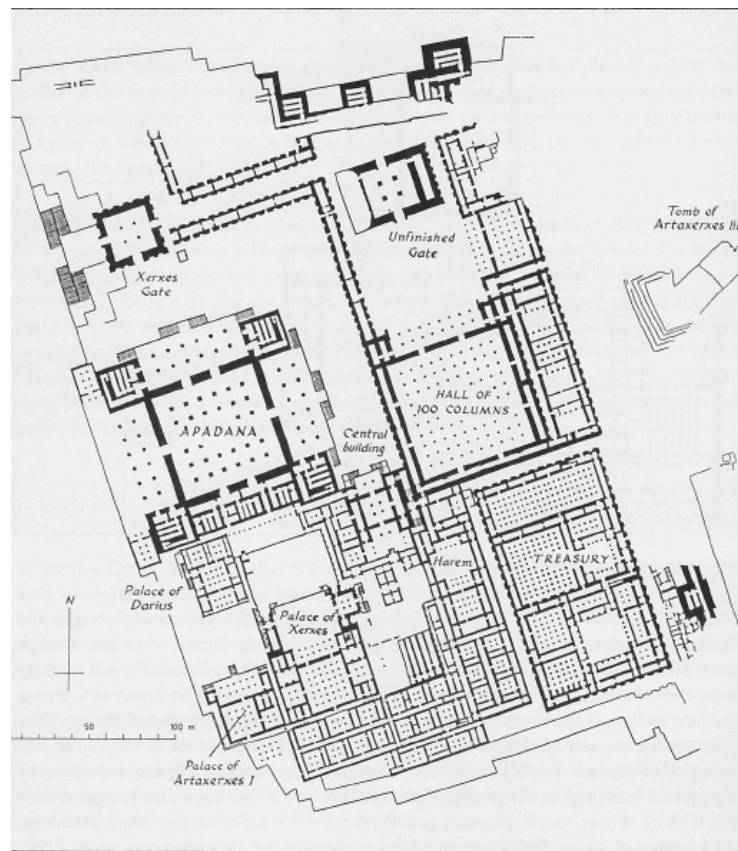


Figure 22: Plan of Persepolis

Darius I was the most prolific builder of the Achaemenid kings.<sup>112</sup> He initiated the building program at Persepolis around 518, establishing a site that the subsequent Achaemenid kings would all add to with other buildings and embellishment (Figure 22). Persepolis seemed to represent the empire not only to Darius but also to his successors: the empire had grown into a power larger than any the world had ever witnessed, and everyone who came to Persepolis saw

<sup>112</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Curtis, 54, 62; Root, "Circles of Artistic Programming," 116.

this authority evident in the great labor required to build such a place as well as in the visual rhetoric that adorned its walls.

The purpose of Persepolis is disputed.<sup>113</sup> Some scholars believe that it was a center of celebration and a place to commemorate the festival of a new year, No Ruz, a celebration that continues in Iran today. However, the presence of administrative archives proves that Persepolis was a functioning governmental center year-round. Others wonder if Persepolis could have included a residential area, since the structures in the plains around the central buildings remain unexcavated, thus holding the potential to reveal domestic areas. Altogether it seems most likely that Persepolis was multi-functional, so that the kings could take up residence, conduct administrative business, and hold celebrations.

The palace terrace at Persepolis provides a clear example of Achaemenid Persian artistic adaptation from others.<sup>114</sup> One remembers the monumental reliefs on the walls of the Assyrian palaces, and will see the use of this medium, though with wholly different content, on the walls at Persepolis. Root states:

...The king, as ultimate patron at Persepolis, commissioned a program that reflected his own worldview and proved the formal setting for his own experience. But Persepolis was also meant to address a wider audience. It was calculated not only to reflect but also assert an ideology. Persepolis was an environment calculated by its imperial patron to induce responses among peoples of the empire from near and far. All this was accomplished by a program that partook of essential qualities of artistic traditions that were not moribund, but which had active and immediate associations.<sup>115</sup>

This is an important reminder that the Persians were not bound by Near Eastern artistic tradition, but instead showed great intent and creativity with their iconographic and stylistic choices.

### *Persepolis: the Apadana*

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<sup>113</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Curtis, 67-69.

<sup>114</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Curtis, 102.

<sup>115</sup> Root, "Circles of Artistic Programming," 134.



The Apadana (“Audience Palace”) is a columned hall on the Persepolis terrace commissioned by Darius (as indicated by an inscription) and completed by Xerxes.<sup>116</sup> On the north and east sides of the hall are staircases displaying registers carved in relief, and the two mirror each other in their sculpted design. The registers depict a procession leading toward the middle scene of the king sitting on his throne being approached by a figure acknowledging him, perhaps marking the beginning of a gift-giving ceremony (Figure 23).<sup>117</sup>



*Figure 23: Original central panel of the Apadana, north stair, Persepolis*

Behind the king are rows of Persian nobles, guards, and chariots (Figure 24). Facing him are twenty-three delegations of subject peoples carrying gifts, as offerings to the king enthroned. The figures’ clothing and the items they bring distinguish them and their ethnicity. Part of Darius’ worldview and imperial rhetoric depended on his depiction of multiple distinct ethnicities under his control. With these processions the king showed everyone at Persepolis that he had the ability to garner their support and draw them from afar to the imperial capital bearing tribute. This is certainly one form of human dominance, though subtle, as it implies both the great power the

<sup>116</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Curtis, 65-67; Root, *The King and Kingship*, 240.

<sup>117</sup> This central scene was later replaced with a different image that showed spear- and shield-bearers moving towards a central panel, while the original sculpture was moved to virtual enshrinement in a special room of the Treasury.

king held over others in order to achieve this gathering and the apparent cheerful harmony that characterized the subject peoples' participation in the imperial event.



Figure 24: Apadana relief, chariots and dignitaries in court and military dress

First in line of the registers heading toward the centrally enthroned king are the so-called Susian Guards.<sup>118</sup> Each guard holds a spear, and these serve as an implicit reference to warfare, or at least military might. Among the procession of subject peoples are some delivering Median riding costume to the king. Herodotus mentions that Median riding clothing was an important gift for the Persians.<sup>119</sup> Root postulates that the significance behind such a gift is that it signifies “the king-as-warrior” because it is what Persians wore in battle.<sup>120</sup> She concludes that the figures appearing in Median dress on the Apadana reliefs were not meant to represent actual Medes, but instead highlight the military affiliation of the figures. And, because the nobles standing behind the enthroned king wear both the Persian court robe and the Median riding costume, the riding costume as a gift joins two aspects of the Persian elite: serving at the court and serving in the

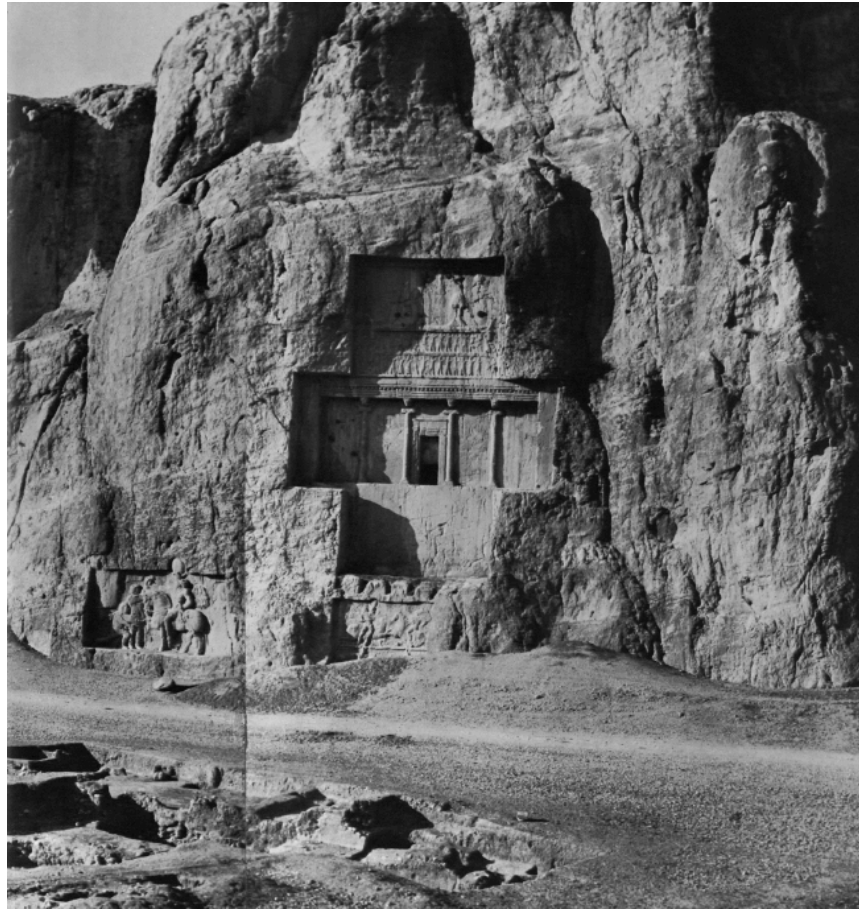
<sup>118</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Root, *The King and Kingship*, 233, 279-281; Susa was another imperial capital. Similarly to Persepolis, its palace walls display elaborately detailed guards, though made of glazed brick. (Allen, *The Persian Empire*, 68.)

<sup>119</sup> Hdt. 3.84.

<sup>120</sup> Root, *The King and Kingship*, 281.

military. In this way, the Apadana reliefs show the king at the center of a unified empire made possible by the Persian nobles and soldiers that keep the empire secure.

*Naqsh-e-Rostam: royal tombs*



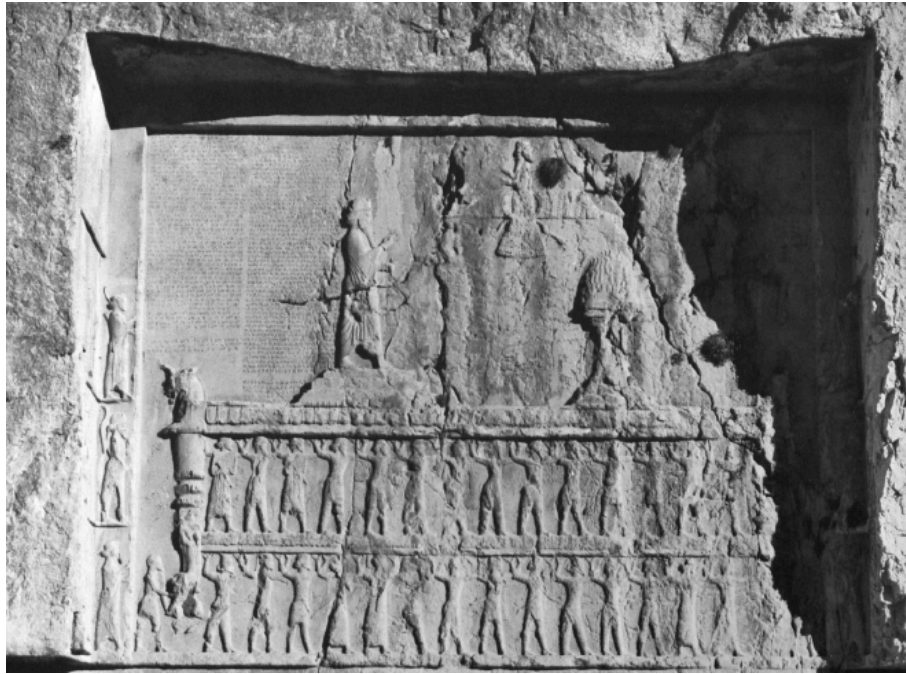
*Figure 25: Tomb of Darius I, Naqsh-e-Rostam*

Naqsh-e-Rostam, a rocky outcrop twelve kilometers northwest of Persepolis, contains the rock-cut tombs of Darius the Great, Xerxes, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II (Figure 25).<sup>121</sup> These tombs were cut into the side of a tall rock, twenty-two meters up the surface of a cliff, and include relief sculptures on the cliff face as well as the royal tombs themselves. The carved scene

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<sup>121</sup> Information for this section comes from Curtis, 69; Stierlin, *Splendors of Ancient Persia*, 158; Schmidt, *Persepolis III*, 81, 84, 86.

on the tomb of Darius I shows the king before a fire altar facing a figure emergent from the winged disk, perhaps representing the god Ahuramazda (Figure 26).



*Figure 26: Top register of tomb of Darius I, Naqsh-i-Rustam*

Darius stands on a stepped pedestal atop a great ornate footstool, with guards behind him shown in three registers. The footstool itself is held aloft by Darius' subject peoples, who balance it on their fingertips in the so-called "Atlas" pose. Below the atlas figures is the façade of a palace with engaged columns and bull-headed protomes serving as column capitals; a doorway leads inside the cliff where the sarcophagi of the king and his family were housed (Figure 27). The palace façade mimics Darius' residential palace at Persepolis in appearance and dimensions so closely that the length of the palace on the tomb differs by only three centimeters from the length of the palace at Persepolis. Inscriptions identify the figures holding the king aloft and additional inscription tells us that one of the figures standing below and behind Darius is a weapon-bearer of the king (Figure 28): "Aspathines, the bowbearer, holds king Darius' battle-ax."<sup>122</sup>

<sup>122</sup> DNd, <http://www.livius.org/aa-ac/achaemenians/DNc-e.html#DNd>.



*Figure 27: Palace façade, tomb of Darius I, Naqsh-i-Rustam*



*Figure 28: Aspathines, tomb of Darius I, Naqsh-i-Rustam*

Aspathines is significant to the discussion here because he wears the military riding dress: his domed hat with tassel, belted knee-length coat, and trousers allude to Achaemenid

military might without depicting it explicitly through a violent scene. Thus this figure standing behind Darius is portrayed and identified as a man of military strength and importance through his garment, his weapons, and his function. Nowhere is he shown slaughtering, flaying, impaling, or beheading his king's enemies. This use of allusion is consistent with the images on the Apadana, where we see distant references to combat, especially in the presence of the king's guards, but no scene directly related to battle.

## ***V.II: Warfare at Persepolis in Glyptic***

The Achaemenid Persians are known for borrowing artistic ideas from other cultures, but the glyptic corpus considered here indicates that they borrowed selectively.<sup>123</sup> Scholars believe that the smaller arts, such as seal carving or toreutic (metalworking), belonged to the same artistic program that produced the monumental art and demonstrated the great cultural mixing that happened throughout the Achaemenid Empire. Glyptic and monumental visual display are intimately related because both were produced and functioned in close proximity to one another.

In this section I explore the few and nuanced examples of warfare imagery in glyptic dating to the reign of Darius by investigating the seal impressions in the Persepolis Fortification Archive. Additionally, I highlight the consistencies in this iconography, such as the common ethnicities of the victims, and how they differ from the rest of the Persepolitan glyptic corpus, as well as the monumental visual culture. Further, I include seals that allude to combat by the inclusion of prisoners. All of these seals are important and help us to understand and contextualize the visual culture of early fifth century Persepolis.

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<sup>123</sup> As Root states, "it was no longer possible to dismiss Achaemenid art as a random set of eclectic 'borrowings.'" (Root, "Circles of Artistic Programming," 127.) This paragraph draws on Root, "Circles of Artistic Programming," 127; Merrillees, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic*, 25.

Starting with Darius I, seals strayed from the popular Babylonian styles to those of a more Persian style, perhaps reflecting the centralization that the king's reforms implemented.<sup>124</sup> During the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses, Neo-Babylonian worship scenes constituted the majority of the extant glyptic corpus, but the production of such seals apparently diminished during Darius' reign. They were replaced by scenes showing heroic encounters in which a human or deity controlled or combated one or more animals, scenes of archers hunting animals from the ground or from chariots, worship scenes that still included the Neo-Babylonian types but branched out to show many new varieties as well, banquet scenes, and iconography showing one or more animals chasing or combating others. Added to this list should be the group, small but important for this discussion, of human combat scenes.

As John Boardman points out,

The earlier Mesopotamian cylinder seals carried a good proportion of divine and mythological action scenes, of which there are none in the Persian series if we except the king fighting a monster. In their place are scenes, though not many, referring directly to the king's success over his enemies, which in Mesopotamia were reserved for the great wall reliefs.<sup>125</sup>

Boardman refers here to the Neo-Assyrian monumental reliefs that showed the king militarily victorious over his enemies. Unlike the Assyrians, the Persians never depicted combat on palace walls — but combat iconography turns up occasionally in the glyptic medium. Indeed, people living in the time of Darius seem to have selected human combat imagery for their seals roughly as frequently as their Neo-Assyrian counterparts had (that is, very infrequently, but it is to be found). The sample of Achaemenid Persian seals displaying images of human combat is comparable to the known number of warfare seals of the Neo-Assyrian era, despite the many

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<sup>124</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Zettler, *On the Chronological Range*, 260, 269; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 69-70, 137; Tuplin, "Sigillography and Soldiers," 2.

<sup>125</sup> Boardman, 166.



thousands of Achaemenid seals known, and one remembers that this earlier corpus is interesting in part because it is so limited.

*Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Archive*

The Persepolis Fortification Archive is a collection of clay tablets excavated from chambers in the northeastern fortification wall at Persepolis in 1933.<sup>126</sup> It includes tens of thousands of clay tablets inscribed with Elamite cuneiform text, hundreds inked or incised with Aramaic text, one tablet inscribed in Akkadian and another in Old Persian cuneiform, one in Greek, and one in Phrygian, as well as thousands of anepigraphic (uninscribed) tablets bearing seal impressions but no administrative text, all dating to the reign of Darius I. This archive offers especially rich evidence for iconographic and social study of the Achaemenid Empire, as it is one of the largest archives of sealed documents excavated from the ancient Near East. The tablets record food disbursements to people working in the empire, either as daily or monthly rations or as travel rations, or they document food disbursements to animals or to gods (i.e., food allotted for sacrifice). Among the approximately 3,000 distinct seals represented in the archive, only 0.002% display warfare iconography — a percentage even smaller than the 1% of Neo-Assyrian seals described already.

*The PFA: warfare representations in glyptic*

The first seal to consider is PFS 93\* (Figure 29) which belonged to an office that dispensed cattle on behalf of the king.<sup>127</sup> This sealstone was an heirloom from the Neo-Elamite

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<sup>126</sup> Henkelman et al., “Clay tags with Achaemenid,” 39-40; of the 2,120 tablets published in the PFA that bear seal impressions, 147 tablets are sealed with more than two seals and up to six seals, 6.93% of the 2,120 (ibid. 52). Additional information for this paragraph comes from Garrison, “Seals and the Elite,” 2; Garrison, “A Persepolis Fortification Seal,” 23, 29-30; Kuhrt, 650.

<sup>127</sup> The asterisk indicates the sealstone was inscribed. This is standard naming practice in the PFA. This paragraph uses information from Garrison, “A Persepolis Fortification Seal,” 25, 29; Zettler, 266; Garrison, “Seals and the Elite,” 4-5.



period and is inscribed “Cyrus the Anshanite, son of Teispes,” naming the grandfather of Cyrus the Great. The seal shows a horseman running over nude victims while pursuing another previously speared figure.

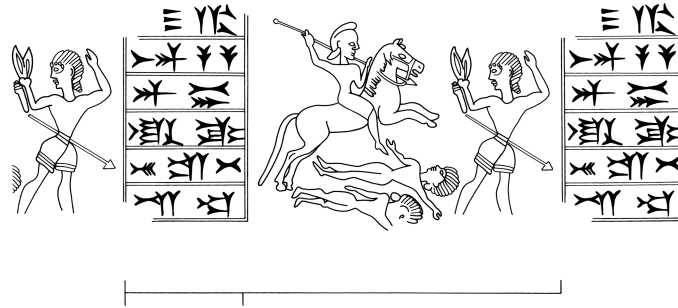


Figure 29: PFS 93\* (drawing by Garrison)

This standing figure looks back at the horseman and holds up his empty quiver and bow. The clothing differs on the two living figures, indicating possible ethnic differences. Depicting the corpses as stacked up and nude adds a level of inequality as they appear utterly degraded. It must be pointed out that this seal was not an Achaemenid Persian product, but was produced a few centuries before the reign of Darius I.<sup>128</sup> Though it is not a product of Persepolis, it is included here because it was used at Persepolis during the reign of Darius I.

In discussing this seal, Pierre Briant contends “there can scarcely be any doubt that at this time one of the justifications of royal authority was physical strength and bravery in war.”<sup>129</sup> This is an important point. PFS 93\* may have perpetuated this idea for a Persian audience interacting with the seal, as it certainly shows human dominance.

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D.M. Lewis contends PFS 93\* is a seventh century seal. (Lewis, “The Persepolis Tablets: speech, seal and script,” 31.)

<sup>128</sup> For this reason PFS 93\* does not appear in Tuplin’s catalogue.

<sup>129</sup> Briant, 90.

Another example of an elite seal is PFS 2899\*, inscribed with Aramaic that might read, “Arshama son of the house” (Figure 30).<sup>130</sup>



Figure 30: PFS 2899\* (drawing by Garrison)

The first example of its use is on a tablet in the PFA, NN 958, that names Arsames, a son of Darius, as the addressor. The other example of its use occurs about fifty years later, also on letters (now housed in the Bodleian library at Oxford), by Arsames, a satrap of Egypt. This seal bears a figure stabbing a human as dead bodies lie on the ground; the victims are shown by their attire to be Scythians.<sup>131</sup> Unmounted horses — a very rare animal in this corpus — frame the central action. A winged symbol hovers above, and an Aramaic inscription fills the field. The composition of this seal shows the victor as larger than the victim to amplify the Persian’s authority over another, and the scattered corpses are reminiscent of the previous seal’s use of the dead to convey a scene of dominance.

PFUTS 273 (Figure 31), a seal that appears on an unscribed tablet, shows a Persian with a long spear attacking another figure and standing on a dead body as a figure emergent from

<sup>130</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Briant, 216; Tuplin, 62.

<sup>131</sup> The Scythians were a group of Central Asian people whom Darius opposed in order to expand the empire. He mentions his campaign against them in the inscription at Behistun. (Allen, 45.) From the fifth column at Behistun, written only in Old Persian: “These Scythians went from me. When I arrived at the sea, beyond it then with all my army I crossed. Afterwards I smote the Scythian exceedingly.” (Cook, *The Persian Empire*, 59.)

the winged disk hovers overhead.<sup>132</sup> The dead body suggests a combat that just preceded the moment portrayed, in a manner similar to the corpses on the previous two seals. Tuplin considers the two standing men to be of similar dignity as both are “solidly upright and firm figures.”<sup>133</sup> In fact, the spearman is shown to be superior by means of his foot’s placement upon the corpse below, an action reminiscent of Darius at Behistun.



Figure 31: PFUTS 273 (drawing by Garrison)

The victor in this scene wears the Persian robe, emphasizing a Persian victory over non-Persians. The presence of the figure emergent from the winged disk overhead recalls the images of divinely supported Persian kingship in monumental art at Behistun and Naqsh-e Rostam. This seal thus identifies Persian dominance through its multiple references to monumental art.

The use of a Persian figure standing on corpses might represent the borrowing of an earlier Near Eastern motif, that of the atlas pose (as at Naqsh-e Rostam), and using it in a military context.<sup>134</sup> This can be labeled more generally as “ascension,” a term Mark Garrison has applied

<sup>132</sup> Information on this seal comes from Tuplin, 62-63.

<sup>133</sup> Tuplin, 63.

<sup>134</sup> This paragraph uses information from Dusinberre, *Aspects of Empire*, 161-162; Root, *King and Kingship*, 147, 152.

to the Achaemenid custom of showing power and the numinous through the use of elevation.<sup>135</sup> The visual expression of “ascension” appears in many forms, such as winged disks, the elevated location of Darius’ monumental art on cliffs, atlantids, astral symbols, pedestal creatures, and Persepolis’ buildings atop a terrace, and thus appear in multiple visual media. Although the corpses on the seals do not assume the exact pose of the traditional atlas figure seen in monumental relief, in which men literally support the king with raised hands, they should be connected more with this motif than with pedestal animals most often depicted on elite seals. In monumental Persian art the atlas pose is used for figures holding up their ruler, and in those examples it contributes to a political scene where the king is the focal point with his support from subject peoples. The monumental examples of the atlas pose display the imperial visual rhetoric that involved a harmonious empire with the king supported by his citizens.

The glyptic examples of this iconography show the same ideal of Persian power through the use of “ascension,” but it has been explicitly militarized. The corpses hold up the Persian victor, both literally and metaphorically, and thus contribute to Persian military success to demonstrate Persian superiority. Unlike the monumental art, we do not always know who commissioned a sealstone. We may postulate that images such as that on PFUTS 273 were used by average Persians who did not have to conform to imperial artistic ideals, but still commissioned a similar idea (“ascendancy”) in a more graphic way (corpses instead of atlas figures). This marks a difference in the portrayal of Persian power since the glyptic examples included all of the violence Darius was careful to hide. In both artistic media we see the image of Persians held aloft to portray Persian success (the king on high in monumental art) and victory (military prowess in glyptic art) since they are elevated by the figures beneath them.

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<sup>135</sup> Garrison, “Iconography of Deities and Demons,” 52.

PFS 2454 (Figure 32) shows an archer with an Assyrian-type garment shooting at a Scythian who already has three arrows shot into him.<sup>136</sup>

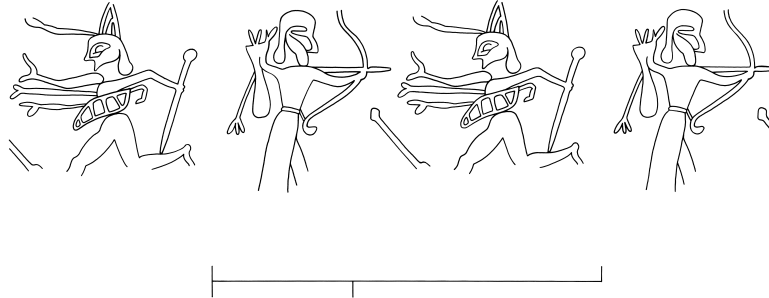
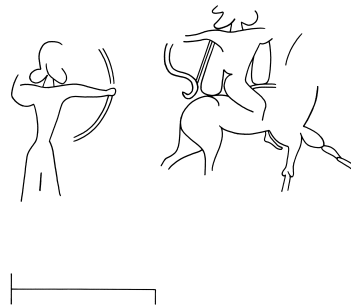


Figure 32: PFS 2454 (drawing by Garrison)

This seal was impressed onto a tablet in the PFA during 504/503. Because the Scythian has already been hit with arrows, the viewer acknowledges the battle started before the moment depicted, implying that the scene we see is not the only one to consider. Additionally, one wonders if the number of arrows in the victim and the promise of another allude to more than just the killing of a foe — certainly the multitude of arrows would have done quite some harm already and anymore might seem unnecessary, or might reference the Achaemenid military tactic of releasing a multitude of arrows upon the enemy. Perhaps the excessive violence is an attempt to accentuate the shooter's military prowess, similarly to the use of corpses in the previous seals. It is thought provoking that someone in the Persian Empire used a seal with an Assyrian-looking victor. The use of a Scythian figure as victim is not unusual on Persian seals, but depicting a non-Persian victor is certainly an interesting outlier. Perhaps the commissioner of this seal drew on Neo-Assyrian military success (and explicit depictions of it) for inspiration, in a similar way to Darius' likeness at Behistun to Ashurbanipal.

<sup>136</sup> Information for this seal comes from Tuplin, 17, 67-68.

Another example of an archer in combat appears on PFUTS 251 (Figure 33), also on an uninscribed tablet. This seal depicts an archer shooting at another archer on horseback; both figures are of unknown identity, but they could be considered Persian based on appearance. Neither figure wears distinct clothing, nor is one differentiated from the other by means of appearing more dominant and it is difficult to determine who the victor will be. This ambiguity in ethnicity and victor sets the seal apart from the rest of the tiny corpus of seals showing warfare in the Persepolis Fortification Archive.



*Figure 33: PFUTS 251 (drawing by Garrison)*

#### *The PFA: allusions to warfare in glyptic*

Of the ca. 3000 seals represented by their impressions in the PFA, only the five discussed here show explicit scenes of human combat. However, others may make oblique references to combat, such as PFS 1156 (Figure 34). This seal was used in 499/8 and shows a captive led towards a figure sitting on a throne. PFS 2218 (Figure 35) is the mirror image of PFS 1156. While this act does not necessarily guarantee that combat just occurred, the capture of prisoners was certainly an element of combat and these seals may portray the human spoils of war.

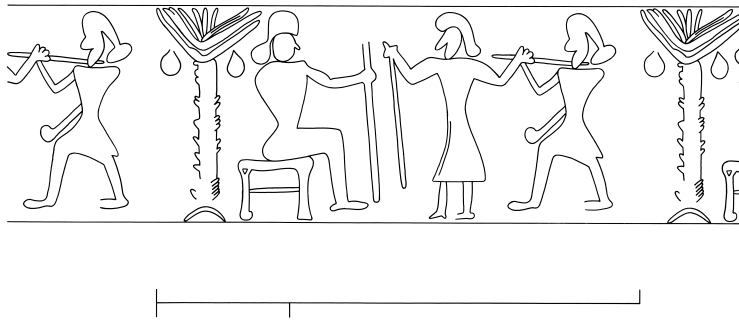


Figure 34: PFS 1156 (drawing by Garrison)

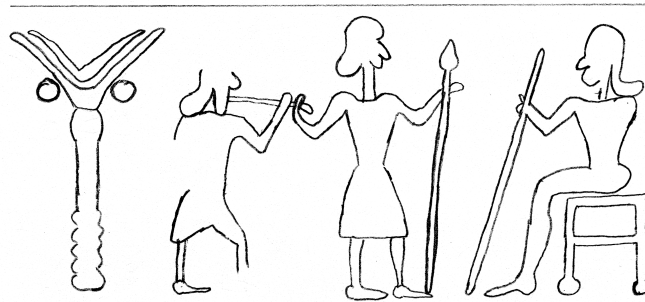


Figure 35: PFS 2218 (drawing by Garrison)

### *Unprovenanced Warfare Representations in Achaemenid Glyptic*

To see an even broader comparison we must consider the larger glyptic repertoire — this means consulting unprovenanced seals that are considered Neo-Assyrian or Achaemenid Persian for stylistic reasons. For Assyria I did my own search through all of the known seals I had access to, and compiled a list of nine seals that show directly or allude to combat. My point of comparison for this corpus is Tuplin's catalogue of Achaemenid era warfare iconography in glyptic of sixty-three seals (of which six, plus PFS 93\*, have been discussed here) because its inclusions are primarily unprovenanced. It is important to point out that the significantly smaller sample of warfare in Neo-Assyrian glyptic that I found does not represent a lesser interest in such iconography than does the Achaemenid. Instead, the numbers probably reflect Tuplin's far

more extensive research in this area than mine and should not be confused for a true discrepancy in the interest in warfare iconography among ancient seal users.

Tuplin's catalogue is especially significant for its discovery that Achaemenid seals displaying human dominance tend to depict ethnicity, a feature that is largely absent from other iconography in the seals of the PFA. The most common ethnicities identified by Tuplin are Scythian and Greek, but he also finds Egyptian opponents in his corpus. While the imperial visual culture often depicts unity throughout the empire, even unity through diversity, the glyptic scenes of warfare highlight ethnic differences of the figures to show Persian dominance. Thus we might view the Achaemenid seals as the direct successors to the Neo-Assyrian ones showing iconography of human dominance, as they are so few in number and they evoke elements of the monumental Assyrian visual depictions of war.



## Chapter VI: Achaemenid Imperial and Archival Texts

Darius' monumental rhetoric is formally phrased and focuses largely on his building projects, the extent of the empire and his many subject nations, and the goodwill of the god Ahuramazda.<sup>137</sup> The inscription at Behistun, outlining his military exploits around his accession to the throne, provides the solitary example of historical narrative from his reign. Often the inscriptions are trilingual, written in Elamite, Akkadian, and Old Persian.<sup>138</sup> Unlike the monumental textual sources, the archival documents at Persepolis offer a different scope of the empire, one that focuses on everyday activity, administration, and both royal and non-royal people. Both of these textual sources together offer insight into the empire's rhetoric, both the royal and the administrative, and provide a contrast to the visual culture at Persepolis.

### ***VI.I: Monumental Inscriptions***

#### *Imperial Rhetoric: Behistun*

The text accompanying the sculpted relief at Behistun appears in three languages (Elamite, Old Persian, and Babylonian) and describes Darius' victory over Gaumata as follows: Cambyzes, the king of Persia following Cyrus, murdered his brother, Bardiya; an imposter, Gaumata, claimed to be Bardiya and incited a revolt in an attempt to usurp the Persian throne; Cambyzes died on his way to calm the revolt, creating an opportunity for Darius to establish himself as king.<sup>139</sup> Gaumata's deception in trying to seize the throne caused great turmoil in the empire so Darius' rectification of these events led him to become the savior and the righteous leader for the Persians. Both the image and the text show multiple events happening in one place and time, a conflation of events and sequences that probably owed much to Assyrian precedent.

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<sup>137</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Cook, 12.

<sup>138</sup> Elamite was a common language at Susa, Akkadian was used by the Babylonians and Assyrians, and the Persians created the Old Persian script to write their language for imperial texts. (Cook, 13)

<sup>139</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Waters, 63.

In offering this historical account, Darius included details far more violent and graphic than we see elsewhere in his imperial texts. One such example explains how he tortured and killed a Median king, Phraortes:

King Darius says: Thereupon that Phraortes fled thence with a few horsemen to a district in Media called Rhagae. Then I sent an army in pursuit. Phraortes was taken and brought unto me. I cut off his nose, his ears, and his tongue, and I put out one eye, and he was kept in fetters at my palace entrance, and all the people beheld him. Then did I crucify him in Ecbatana; and the men who were his foremost followers, those at Ecbatana within the fortress, I flayed and hung out their hides, stuffed with straw.<sup>140</sup>

This example shows the narrative nature of Behistun's inscriptions and how Darius presented himself as a ruler to those who misbehaved. Such rhetoric, which so vividly recalls the Neo-Assyrian approach to power, remained unparalleled anywhere else during his reign or those of his successors.

### *Imperial Rhetoric: Persepolis*

The textual imperial rhetoric at Persepolis echoes the visual rhetoric that we saw on the Apadana. In a dedication inscription on the terrace wall, the large stone platform upon which the site's buildings stood, Darius commissioned the following inscription, written in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian:

King Darius: This country Persia which Ahuramazda gave to me is a good country, full of good horses, full of good men. By the favor of Ahuramazda and of me, king Darius, this country fears no other country.

King Darius says: May Ahuramazda and the gods of the royal house come to my aid. May Ahuramazda protect this country from invaders, from famine and from the Lie! May there never be upon this country an army, famine, or the Lie!<sup>141</sup>

The inscription following this one, also on the terrace wall, discusses by name the many countries that the empire controlled.<sup>142</sup> These are interesting inscriptions because they seem to

<sup>140</sup> DB, column 2, lines 71-78; <http://www.livius.org/be-bm/behistun/behistun-t20.html#2.71-78>.

<sup>141</sup> DPd, <http://www.livius.org/aa-ac/achaemenians/DPd.html>.

include the imperial rhetoric that encourages unity, but also remark on the ability and fear-inducing quality of the Persian army and the king. Additionally, they underscore that the balance for the king and his army brings prosperity to the people; this military component appears in the visual rhetoric with the march of The Immortals (recall Figure 4) but nowhere else in a more graphic manner. Darius is explicit: Ahuramazda, the great god, is responsible for him being king, having strong men and horses, being fearless, and even calls on the gods to request that they be untouchable.

Darius often invokes Ahuramazda, the great god, in his imperial inscriptions and states the deity's support of his kingship.<sup>143</sup> Interestingly, and unlike some Near Eastern traditions, Ahuramazda did not have the prominence in imperial imagery that other kings afforded their gods. Boardman notes the lack of the divine being at Persepolis, and tentatively attributes this to Darius appealing to a visiting non-Persian audience whose attention he wanted to capture as himself being at the center of the empire, rather than the god. The absence is all the more notable since Ahuramazda (if this is the correct identification of the figure emergent from the winged disk) appears interacting with Darius in the relief sculptures of both Behistun and Naqsh-e Rostam. The emphasis on Ahuramazda in Darius' imperial inscriptions, however, is significant as it placed the god in a public display at Persepolis even when he did not appear there visually.

Thus Persepolis proclaimed that the Persian Empire stood at a harmonious balance thanks to King Darius, the god Ahuramazda, and the empire's collective physical strength. Indeed, this was the constructed view of the world that Darius wanted his people to see. At Persepolis he rejected images of violence altogether, openly showing his vision of a new world order, one of peace, to all who visited.

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<sup>142</sup> DPe, <http://www.livius.org/aa-ac/achaemenians/DPe.html>.

<sup>143</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Boardman, 145-146.

*Imperial Rhetoric: Naqsh-i-Rustam*

The inscription on Darius' tomb lists the countries he ruled throughout his reign, as well as asserting his heritage and relationship to the great god Ahuramazda. It refers directly to the sculptural program at Persepolis as well as his tomb:

Darius the King says: Ahuramazda, when he saw this earth in commotion, thereafter bestowed it upon me, made me king; I am king. By the favor of Ahuramazda I put it down in its place; what I said to them, that they did, as was my desire. If now you shall think that "How many are the countries which King Darius held?" look at the sculptures (of those) who bear the throne, then shall you know, then shall it become known to you: the spear of a Persian man has gone forth far; then shall it become known to you: a Persian man has delivered battle far indeed from Persia.<sup>144</sup>

This is an interesting passage because Darius makes reference to his artistic program overall, not only the one the viewer would see next to this inscription. He was enthroned both here on his tomb as well as at Persepolis, so the king recalls his use of this imagery in multiple places. Moreover, he explicitly connects military strength to the size of his empire by stating that his army was victorious far from the Persian heartland. This is not something we see depicted at Persepolis, where instead the various peoples represent these foreign areas. At Naqsh-i-Rustam as at Persepolis, Darius does not show the battles themselves but the aftermath of his victory in them. It is only through the verbal rhetoric of the inscriptions that we discover the military might that led to the Persian balance and unity that Darius so often portrayed in his visual culture.

***VI.II: Archival Texts from Persepolis***

It is important to acknowledge that the glyptic images of warfare discussed previously did not exist in isolation, but instead served very specific administrative functions. They appear on a variety of text categories found in the PFA, and sometimes by tracing a seal's use, we can learn about the individual or office to whom it belonged or the environment in which it was used.

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<sup>144</sup> DNa, 30-47, <http://www.avesta.org/op/op.htm#dna>.

Additionally, some seals appeared on uninscribed clay tablets on which they served some administrative function. In this section I explore the texts of the documents in the PFA bearing scenes of warfare, as well as highlight the textual evidence for the Persian military at Persepolis.<sup>145</sup> These texts include terms such as “spear” and “soldier” and I discuss their possible implications for understanding the military presence at Persepolis when possible. These words, like the seals, are rare in the archive, having a collective presence on only 0.009% of the PFA’s texts.

Thousands of tablets in the PFA display seal impressions but no text (the uninscribed tablets). Some scholars believe that the anepigraphic tablets were paired with parchment documents with Aramaic writing, or were attached to various commodities.<sup>146</sup> Two of the seals with warfare iconography under evaluation here appeared on uninscribed tablets. While this type of tablet offers us less information about a seal’s context because we do not know the circumstances in which it was used, they nonetheless obviously functioned as an integral part of the archive. Unfortunately, the uninscribed tablets cannot tell us more about the human combat seals studied here, and the following discussion necessarily focuses on inscribed tablets bearing impressions of seals with military iconography.

*The PFA: tablets inscribed with Elamite*

The majority (five out of seven) of the warfare scenes in this archive appear on clay documents bearing Elamite inscriptions — the type of document that makes up the vast majority of the PFA. The seals described in this paper were used by a variety of people. A translation and discussion of each type of document that bears a human combat seal is detailed below. While the

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<sup>145</sup> I am very fortunate to have had access to the PFA Project’s tablet databases, which allowed me to complete searches for tablets containing military vocabulary.

<sup>146</sup> Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, 4, 7.

glyptic warfare iconography does not appear to have been used in a common administrative context — in other words we cannot deduce that warfare iconography was restricted to the elite or only used in, say, wine-related transactions — each example of its use offers a broad look at Persepolitan administrative activity during the reign of Darius I. In addition, the texts allow us to learn more about the sealstones that impressed the documents and the people who used them. This is invaluable information that we would not know by looking solely at the sealstone impressions.

### ***VI.II.a: Texts Accompanying Seals Bearing Warfare Iconography***

#### *The PFA: B Text — delivery*

The so-called B texts in the Fortification Archive detail the delivery of commodities to Persepolis.<sup>147</sup> Seal PFS 2454 appears once, impressed on the reverse surface of tablet NN 1478, which describes a transaction involving the delivery of hides to the treasury (a common B text commodity).<sup>148</sup> The translation reads as follows:

<sup>01</sup> 37 sheep/goats, <sup>01-02</sup> allocation from Pukšakka, <sup>03</sup> were slaughtered; <sup>04-06</sup> their hides Bakadušda and Hakištiparra received and <sup>06-08</sup> delivered at the ‘treasury’ (craft centre).  
<sup>08-09</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> year, <sup>10-11</sup> eleventh month.

While both the supplier and the recipient (or intermediaries in this case — Bakadušda and Hakištiparra — who delivered the hides) appear in the transaction, it is difficult to determine to whom PFS 2454 belonged or who used this seal. Bakadušda is active elsewhere in the archive (identified by name) completing the same job of transporting hides to the Treasury. Very often he is named on tablets sealed with PFS 127, PFS 128, and PFS 129, and in fact PFS 129 appears on NN 1478, perhaps eliminating Bakadušda as the user of PFS 2454 and possibly implicating

<sup>147</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Hallock, 14; Frye, “Cyrus the Mede and Darius the Achaemenid?” 18.

<sup>148</sup> A tablet labeled “NN” indicates that it was read by Hallock, but not published by him. Hallock published tablets labeled “PF.”

him as the user of PFS 129. Hakištiparra is involved in one additional PFA transaction that involves giving grain to Atossa, a wife of Darius I and daughter of Cyrus II (the Great). NN 1478 is the only example of Pukšakka's activity in the PFA. It is possible that PFS 2454 belonged to either Hakištiparra or Pukšakka; in any case the description of hides being collected and delivered to the treasury demonstrates the seal's use in official business.

*The PFA: E K1 Text — utilization, religious duty*

E texts generally describe rations given to people who were making, doing, or performing a task.<sup>149</sup> PFS 2124 appears on one such document, NN 339, which reads:

<sup>01-02</sup> 60 qts. of wine, <sup>02-03</sup> allocation from Ibaturre, <sup>04-05</sup> Kitikka received and <sup>05-07</sup>  
offered it to Humban, <sup>08-09</sup> at the River Betir. <sup>09-10</sup> 23<sup>rd</sup> year.

Humban, a deity who appears fourteen times in the PFA, is the most commonly mentioned god in the archive, included in texts more often than all of the other named gods combined. The K1 designation indicates that the payment of wine went to an individual who performed a religious duty. Ibaturre appears on twenty-nine tablets, allocating wine or dates to humans (either for their own consumption or to be given to the named god) or horses. On the tablets on which he supplies the commodity, other seals appear quite frequently (namely PFS 41 and PFS 184). This tablet marks Kitikka's only appearance in the PFA. Perhaps because PFS 2124 is used only once, and Kitikka is only named once, this seal belonged to him. This would indicate that PFS 2124, one of the few seals bearing warfare images, fulfilled an administrative function that led to a religious act involving the most commonly named god in the PFA. It might also indicate that the people sacrificing to Humban varied.

*The PFA: J Text — royal provisions*

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<sup>149</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Hallock, 18-19.

J texts are rare in the PFA, accounting for only fifty-three of the published documents, and are distinctive due to their reference to the king.<sup>150</sup> The transactions detail the disbursement of food around the empire and mention the king with the phrases “dispensed in behalf of the king,” “dispensed before the king,” and “consumed before the king.” It is uncertain what exactly these statements meant. It is possible that the commodities were in fact consumed *with* the king, as might happen during his travels. This could account for the amounts of food involved. Some of the J texts record very large amounts of a commodity, far more than an individual could consume. For example, one J text records a transaction for an amount of flour that equals 17,830 individual daily rations.<sup>151</sup> However, we must be cautious not to jump to the conclusion that all of these rations were in fact consumed by one person at one time, just that the recipients, perhaps royal, were responsible for feeding large numbers of people or consumed the food over a period of time.

One of our glyptic warfare examples, PFS 93\*, appears exclusively on J texts. This is one of three seals that was used by an office that oversaw the transactions in the J texts, and PFS 93\* dealt specifically with cattle disbursement. Considering the textual connection to the king, it is possible that the cattle simply belonged to the royal family and did not move around — there is little evidence of the office represented by PFS 93\* travelling. The J texts provide an intriguing context in which to view the warfare scene on PFS 93\*. This seal served in an exclusive administrative context, demonstrating that warfare iconography could be employed at the highest level of Achaemenid society. The following tablet, NN 921, is one example of PFS 93\*’s use:

<sup>01</sup> 30 lambs, <sup>02</sup> 60<sup>?</sup> yearling (lambs), <sup>03</sup> allocation from Harša, <sup>04-05</sup> were consumed before the King, <sup>05-06</sup> (at) Karruš<sup>?</sup>. 22<sup>nd</sup> year.

<sup>150</sup> Information for this section comes from Garrison, “A Persepolis Fortification Seal,” 29; Hallock, 24-25; Henkelman, “Consumed Before the King,” 11.

<sup>151</sup> PF 702



In this translation we see a large number of animals, more than one person could consume in a month, “consumed before the king.” If in fact the meat was eaten in the king’s presence, this transaction and the seal ratifying it demonstrate the numbers of people the king was expected to feed.

*The PFA: M Text — special rations*

M texts are defined by the very small size of rations they record.<sup>152</sup> A typical grain ration for an individual for one month in the PFA is 3 BAR (1 BAR = approximately ten liters), and the special rations in the M texts are about 1/10 BAR, or the amount of an additional day’s ration per month. Hallock assumes that the M texts document rare instances when someone received an extra ration because the texts that detail the normal-sized rations are much more common in the archive, so it would make sense that the M texts documented special occasions. PFS 1105 appears on an M text, tablet PF 1168. It reads,

<sup>01-08</sup> 40 (BAR of) grain, supplied by Parru, Puktukka received, and gave (it) as *kamakaš* to workers, whose apportionments are set by Uštana.

Though this specific transaction does not appear to discuss a small ration (though of course we do not know among how many workers the 40 BAR of grain was spread) the use of the word *kamakaš* (“an (extra) daily ration (per month)”), a common word in the M texts, identifies this document as belonging to the M text category. Parru, the supplier on PF 1168, appears often in the PFA in a variety of text categories, usually on documents allocating grain or flour.

*The PFA: N Text — mothers’ rations*

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<sup>152</sup> Information for this section comes from Hallock, 35-37; Aperghis, “War Captives,” 131.

According to N texts, mothers who had just given birth were given single payments of a food or beverage.<sup>153</sup> From the amounts detailed in these transactions we see that mothers with newborn boys received double the amount of food or drink compared to mothers of newborn girls, and we should probably interpret these payments as rewards. This may reflect the empire's attitude toward growing the male population that would eventually aid the work force and military. Also indicative of this is the use of the word *kurtaš* ("worker") to describe the mothers, who sometimes are even named in the transaction. They have done their job and contributed to the empire by giving birth, or perhaps were expectant mothers who worked for the government. Wine is the most common reward given to these women, along with beer, and slightly less common are grains and cereals.

PFS 1105 appears on two N texts, NN 1942 and NN 3106. Both of these texts are receipts of flour given to "female workers," *kurtaš*. In NN 1942, Parru allocates flour that Puktukka receives and gives to the women. The administrative relationship between these two named figures is one we have seen before in the M texts. NN 3106, the other N text bearing PFS 1105, describes an allocation of flour from someone named Zazzap (as opposed to Parru), while Puktukka receives the food and gives it to the nursing mothers.

#### *The PFA: T Text — letters*

There are eighty-two published T texts, or letters, over half of which were dictated by two highly ranked individuals.<sup>154</sup> Parnaka, the head administrator at the PFA and an uncle of Darius, addressed twenty-seven of these, and Ziššawiš, another important official at the PFA,

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<sup>153</sup> Information for this section comes from Hallock, 37-38.

<sup>154</sup> Information for this section comes from Garrison et al., *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, 7.

addressed twenty-one of them.<sup>155</sup> Nineteen additional individuals addressed the remaining thirty-four letters.

PFS 2899\* appears on a letter, NN 958, addressed by Iršama (Arsames) and sent to Ušaya.<sup>156</sup> Iršama states that grain is to be issued from his estate to Šuruba. Iršama is the son of the queen Irtašduna and Darius, indicating that this document and its seal impressions functioned at the highest level of Achaemenid society — the royal court. This is significant to our study of warfare iconography. PFS 93\* is also an elite seal that displays human combat and was an heirloom, while PFS 2899\* was itself to become an heirloom.

Though the heirloom status complicates our view of the warfare iconography, as this could have added greater value to the seal, we might wonder if in fact the warfare scenes contributed to the extended use of these seals. Perhaps its iconography, as well as the elite status of the individual who first used it, made it more likely a seal would be used as an heirloom. Thus the antique quality of the seal might not have been its only desirable quality. While we cannot determine exactly why these seals became heirlooms, this is a feature of sealstones to keep in mind as more research continues into Achaemenid glyptic art.

### *The PFA: uninscribed tablets bearing seal impressions*

Two of the seals considered for their warfare scenes in this paper, PFUTS 273 and PFUTS 251, appear on uninscribed tablets.<sup>157</sup> Due to the lack of additional information accompanying these seals, it is impossible to know in what contexts they were used or who used them, aside from the larger administrative environment of the PFA. This uncertainty may change

<sup>155</sup> Both Parnaka and Ziššawiš appear in many texts as the suppliers of a *halmi*, an official document that ordered rations for travelers. They also addressed letters that dictate the movement of commodities.

<sup>156</sup> Information for this paragraph comes from Tuplin, 12, 57-58, 61-62; Hallock, 50-53.

<sup>157</sup> A few of the seals bearing images of military iconography were impressed on tablets in the PFA written in Aramaic. It has unfortunately not been possible for me to obtain translations of those tablets in time to complete this thesis, so those texts remain undiscussed here. I requested the translation of the V text represented in this corpus, Fort. 1401-101 (sealed with PFS 2218), but it was unavailable at the time I completed this thesis.

as more seal impressions are discovered in the archive that would bring additional examples of these seals on inscribed clay documents.

### ***VI.II.b: Textual Evidence for the Military in the PFA***

Because the documents in the PFA discuss such ubiquitous items as food, it is plausible that all sects of Persepolitan society would be represented in the administrative records. This very well could include soldiers who would certainly require rations while serving the empire. This section attempts to illuminate some of these examples, by providing instances of soldiers' existence in an administrative context as suggested purely by the texts. Some of the translations are fragmentary, or the semantics are in question. Nevertheless, it seems important to acknowledge the texts and point out when any mention of warfare might exist. The following are the possible allusions to warfare in the texts of the PFA.

#### *The PFA: "troops"*

The PFA contains few textual hints at military life. For example, the word "troops/army" appears on only one tablet, NN 1886, in the form of an Old Persian word (a standout in the Elamite document). This tablet discusses a transaction that involved the allocation of beer for twenty-six men, which was approved by the king via a *halmi* — a sealed document authorizing the movement of goods.

#### *The PFA: "soldiers"*

There are forty-two documents (0.0084% of the overall PFA corpus) that mention the word *taššup*, "soldier." However, the term's meaning is dubious. This word may also be translated as "people," and this is how Hallock interpreted it. The variation of this word's meaning challenges our understanding of the documents using it because we cannot be sure if the

individuals constituted an army or if they were simply groups of people, perhaps groups of workers. Nevertheless, many of these documents mention the king, usually with reference to his *halmi*, perhaps indicating that the groups of people were soldiers.

Additional evidence that might point to the “soldier” translation rather than the more generic “people” translation is that most of these documents say where the commodity was deposited or consumed. Perhaps this indicates the movement of troops around the empire rather than a group of stationary people at Persepolis. Moreover, many of the transactions detail very large amounts of grain, like PF 200, which states 3,440 BAR of grain was given to “soldiers/people.” As we saw previously, 1/10 of a BAR constitutes a daily ration of grain. This would have been enough grain to last one person 34,440 days, or ninety-four years, or perhaps it was enough to feed an army.

Some of these tablets mention both animals and “soldiers/people” receiving flour rations as ordered via a *halmi* from the king. PF 1397 is an especially illuminating document because it lists how many people and animals received food and in what amounts. The transaction involved 29 BAR of flour to be spread among 180 adults (0.15 BAR each), fifty boys (0.1 BAR each), three horses (0.3 BAR each), and three mules (0.2 BAR each). While these are not enough animals to serve an army, we do see that these adults (perhaps soldiers) received slightly larger rations than average (1/10 BAR), if this food was meant to last for one day. This might indicate that the soldiers received greater rations than an average person working in another capacity at Persepolis. However, it is clear from other documents that the word *taššup* did not always highlight higher levels of rations for the recipients.

*The PFA: “war prisoner”*

Another uncertain term for men receiving rations is the word for “war prisoner” (lit. “forced by defeat”) — *rabbap*. This term appears on three tablets that are nearly identical in commodity (grain), amount (2 BAR each), and number of recipients (two-three men).<sup>158</sup>

Although these tablets do not expand on the events that led to the imprisonment and leave out any details of an actual war, they do add to our understanding of the archive’s range, since now we have seen receipts of disbursement at the royal level as well as that of those imprisoned in the empire. One wonders if the limited number of documents (0.0006% of PFA corpus) including this word and the few men in each indicates that a miniscule number of war prisoners were fed from storehouses at Persepolis during this time period, or if there was a tiny number of war prisoners overall at Persepolis.

#### *The PFA: “battle”*

There is only one tablet in the archive that alludes to battle. NN 1909 details a disbursement of 100 BAR of grain to be divided among 100 men for ten days. This equals a normal ration of 1/10 BAR per person per day. The text refers to the men receiving the grain as Skudrians (a Central Asian group of people), “who are to deliver battle at the place X...” Like the previous tablets, this text does not provide any military details. However, the document is significant because it records an act of acknowledging such people and the action for which they needed food. A tablet like this one, though simple in detail, adds evidence to a study of warfare at Persepolis. It indicates the variety of people found at Persepolis, shows that non-Persians received food that was kept track of by the Achaemenid administration, and implies the broad circumstances that necessitated government rations.

#### *The PFA: Weapons — “quiver,” “arrow,” “spear”*

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<sup>158</sup> NN 735, NN 990, NN 1321

One tablet, PF 1560 (a Q text — travel ration), lists a disbursement of wine for someone named Aššašturrana, referred to as the “quiver bearer.” He carried a *halmi* from Parnaka and went to the king. We have no assurance that this person had any military affiliation, but it is possible given his identification as associated with his weapon, as well as his destination of the king. We have seen groups of “soldiers” (*taššup*) in previous examples, and none of them are ever identified by their military skill or weaponry. PF 1560 is an interesting outlier, as it serves as the only example of someone who is identified by name and as “quiver bearer,” maybe an indication that the weapon held special significance to his identity in the empire.

Six individuals (on as many tablets) are titled “spear-bearer.” In five of the six examples, the king either supplied the *halmi* (in one example it comes from Parnaka), or the king is the destination. Also in five of the six texts the spear-bearer leads a group of others and receives the rations on their behalf, and as far as one can tell, the leader is the only figure in the document distinguished by his weapon. Perhaps this separated him from those he led (sometimes referred to as “servants”), and the weapon was a symbol of distinction.

Two documents refer to the construction of arrowheads. NN 1984 is a receipt for grain to be distributed to people of various professions: goldsmith, coppersmith, and bronze/copper arrowhead worker. The rations are to be consumed over thirteen months and go to eleven people. A similar text, NN 2000, is a receipt for a larger disbursement; this time the grain is to be consumed by ninety-nine people (sixty-nine of them are women and girls) over five months. These are workers, possibly reed/arrow shaft producers, and it is notable that both women and men filled these positions. These two texts attest to the production of weaponry at Persepolis and the planning involved in the outfitting of soldiers. These workers were employed for up to a year based on these rations, and are discussed specifically in relation to arrowhead production. It is

possible that other tablets will surface that mention additional types of weaponry production in the empire.

### *Conclusion*

When we consider Achaemenid Persian seals depicting warfare and those making oblique reference to it, we see how this empire's glyptic art is distinct from its monumental art.<sup>159</sup> The data set explored here represents the adoption of an iconography in this artistic medium around 500 that set it apart from the Neo-Babylonian precedents — that of human combat. As is often the case with sealstones, the audience and the person commissioning them remain largely unknown to us. The Persian seal users do not appear always to have followed Darius' monumental iconographic program at Persepolis — occasionally they adopted the very warfare iconography that he neglected and did so with zeal for violence.

As Darius began his reign with consolidation of the empire and suppressing revolts, images of the military could have been at the forefront of Persian society. Perhaps they appeared in the glyptic iconographic repertoire for the first time for this reason. The seals that identify the figures by their ethnicity help the viewer form a more specific image of warfare because the victims and victors stood out as distinctly Persian and non-Persian. This is consistent with Darius' desire to depict his subject peoples (and those whom he conquered) as ethnically diverse, as we saw at all three imperial monuments.

By broadening our investigation with a multi-media data set, monumental and glyptic, as well as limiting its chronological range to the years around 500, we are able to compare these seals and their iconography with the Persepolitan monumental art that underwent construction around 515. By doing so we discover that the seals discussed here are the only examples of

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<sup>159</sup> This paragraph uses Boardman, 158.



warfare iconography at Persepolis, and thus represent a minutely used iconography. Maybe this indicates that the Persians selectively borrowed their artistic ideas from others and adapted an iconography for a new medium that suited their need to depict Persian victory. Only rarely did they take advantage of this opportunity, however.

While it would have been exciting to find tablets that discussed soldiers accompanied by seal impressions depicting them, these archives offer up no such relationships. However, the documents bearing the glyptic warfare iconography attest to the wide reach of these images. The PFA houses warfare scenes on a variety of text categories that involve individuals or offices at different levels of society working with different commodities. This means that Persians did not relegate warfare iconography to certain parts of society. The relationship between administrative document and seal impression in antiquity provides more evidence than looking at these components individually would supply. This illuminates our understanding of warfare iconography at Persepolis during the early fifth century by providing us with a fuller glimpse of Persian society.

Detailing the instances of texts that mention military realia was worth doing because it points out the infrequency with which people discussed such information in this administrative context — only about 0.009% of the archive's texts mention the military in any way, a small number reminiscent of the low percentage of seals that bear warfare iconography. Both percentages are very small, and together they indicate that the administration at Persepolis, as represented by the PFA, was largely concerned with other issues than military display or provisioning.

## **Chapter VII: A Conclusion on Two Empires and Warfare Iconography**

Both of these empires were vast, and their kings relied heavily on military might and visual expression of kingship to control and expand their territories. At first these two empires' circumstances looked similar but they turn out to be quite different after considering their visual and textual rhetoric. In this evidence we see that the Achaemenid and Assyrian kings displayed their ideology of empire in different ways. However, very few individual seal users in both empires chose warfare iconography for their seal images, and those who did, did not always act alike. With these seals they commissioned scenes with nuance and variety that sometimes strayed from the imperial visual culture at the time. The minute samples of glyptic imagery from these eras link the two empires as they share an overarching distaste for this iconographic choice since they share this feature — but as it happens, the seals with iconography of warfare demonstrate that individuals within the two empires depicted these scenes in different ways. Thus the glyptic scenes of warfare both unite and distinguish the Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid Empires.

The Neo-Assyrian kings were concerned with establishing their relationship with Ashur in both visual and textual rhetoric for many to witness. This resulted in the creation of large-scale wall reliefs that adorned their palaces, and a massive textual output, especially in the form of the kings' annals. Their monumental reliefs focused on the kings' military might as well as their piety, included narrative, and graphic details of war, which sent a propagandistic message of Assyrian dominance over others. Backing up the visual rhetoric, the textual evidence echoes this sentiment of Assyrian dominance.

Darius I employed visual rhetoric of a different sort in Achaemenid monumental art. Instead of portraying violence, the king, starting after his work at Behistun (his most

Assyrianizing monument), showed his empire at balance and harmony thanks to the centrality of the Persian king. At Persepolis we witness how Darius' worldview and world portrayal changed from that at his earlier monument. He communicated his ideology of kingship visually at Persepolis with images showing the convergence of many subject peoples that resulted in unity built from diversity. Darius' ideal worldview was one of peace revolving around the Persian king.

The few Neo-Assyrian examples of warfare in glyptic show both military action and the positive and pious aftermath of conquest. Specifically, we saw archers and chariots involved in combat, but we also saw victory banquets with the presence of weaponry. This resulted in both explicit scenes of warfare as well as allusions to it. In an empire whose kings cared about depicting both violence and piety on their palace walls, the people using these few sealstones seem to have shown similar aspects of war.

The Achaemenid seals here showed the opposite of what Darius conveyed in his monumental visual rhetoric. Those few military scenes on seals depict the process and explicit action of human domination. In these examples spearmen and archers actively combat others, often victims of non-Persian ethnicity. These seals indicate that their commissioners acted contrary to Darius and his visual expression of a harmonious empire and indeed displayed a more actively warlike visual stance than their Neo-Assyrian counterparts. Even in the depiction of the aftermath of war, perhaps with the inclusion of captives, the Persian seal users chose scenes not of pious celebration, but of the human spoils of war.

Perhaps one important difference in the visual media is that the creator of sealstones is usually non-royal, which stands in direct contrast to the monumental art that was inherently imperial. The glyptic warfare imagery seems to include users from a variety of social classes and occupations at Persepolis, as we can see from the different types of texts on which they appeared.

This tells us that perhaps anyone could utilize the iconography if they wished, a scene that as far as we can tell mirrors that in the Neo-Assyrian period. How interesting, therefore, that hardly anyone chose to do so. When people did select the imagery of human dominance, they showed great nuance in the use of iconography to create scenes with various aspects of war: soldiers, captives, cavalry, weaponry, and death.

Depicting ethnicity in their visual rhetoric was important to both regimes. It was clear from the Battle of Til-Tuba, for example, that the viewer understood that the Assyrians were not fighting just any battle, but one against the Elamite king. At Behistun, the ethnicity of the conquered kings was essential to the message that the sculpted scene was intended to display. Here Darius stands victorious before defeated non-ethnic Persians, thereby asserting Persian dominance over a vast polyethnic empire. This was the only monumental example of explicit human dominance during the entire Achaemenid period, but of the many Assyrian examples, we know that ethnicity mattered there too. Curiously, in contrast to the Neo-Assyrian glyptic examples, the Achaemenid Persian seals did depict ethnicity. This is important because being able to acknowledge a Persian victory over a non-Persian conveys a stronger message than just ambiguous figures fighting would.

Thanks to the archives both of Assyria and at Persepolis, we have learned a few details about the military workings around their respective empires, such as what and how much soldiers were fed, the potential for production of weaponry and its adornment, and royal banquet demographics. While both archives are illuminating with respect to military realia, the Neo-Assyrian archival texts turned up a significantly higher percentage of texts than the Achaemenid documents at Persepolis: 13% of the Assyrian texts I consulted mentioned some aspect of warfare, compared to only 0.009% of the PFA texts. This is an important difference. Perhaps it

highlights a trend that mirrors the significance of explicit warfare in the monumental visual rhetoric of each empire.

By looking at one iconography and tracing it across empires with consideration of visual and textual evidence, and different audiences (imperial and otherwise), we start to understand the artistic and ideological choices actual people made in antiquity. This allows us to see how ancient societies utilized warfare imagery in their visual and textual rhetoric, and their irregularity in doing so. The evidence here indicates that military iconography was not dependent on artistic medium, nor was it inherent in ancient Near Eastern imperial visual culture. While both empires' kings depicted similar messages — absolute imperial strength — they did so in different ways. At the same time that the Assyrian and Achaemenid kings distinguished their unique imperial visual rhetoric, their seal users bound the two empires together by their desire to see images other than war.

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### Image Sources

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